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ABSTRACT

This report focuses on the development of flexible learning in colleges of further education in Great Britain. An introduction considers the national context, including the advent of National Vocational Qualifications, and the subsequent transition to flexible, learner-centered colleges. Section 1 describes the features of a flexible, accessible, and learner-centered college, organized to meet the needs of individuals, and compares these features with those of a college organized on the basis of groups of students enrolling in conventional courses. Information is presented in the form of a checklist to enable colleges to profile their current ability to provide flexible access to learning for individuals. Topics include marketing and outreach, threshold services, flexible access to learning, flexible access to assessment and accreditation, supporting learning, and infrastructure. Section 2 describes key factors, barriers to progress, and transitional issues currently faced by colleges when attempting to widen access to learning and accreditation. They are grouped under three major headings--strategic management, curriculum management, and operational management--and illustrated by extensive case studies of current practice. Section 3 provides a summary of significant inhibitors to progress, with recommendations for action at a local or national level. (YLB)

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CE 059 880

Part 1
Priorities for action

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Flexible Colleges

Access to learning and qualifications in further education

Part 1
Priorities for action

ISBN 1 85338 250 7

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INTRODUCTION

1. THE DEVELOPMENT OF FLEXIBLE LEARNING IN FURTHER EDUCATION

Colleges of further education have long been concerned to provide flexible learning opportunities to meet the needs of individuals, and this evolution can be traced through the early development of evening classes and the more recent provision of open learning, distance learning, learning workshops, resource-based learning and participation in the Open College. Colleges have also been concerned to provide access to further and higher education for adults with 'non-standard qualifications'.

Flexible learning is being introduced into mainstream FE provision in order to:

- increase access for individuals to learning and accreditation appropriate to their needs and purposes, in order to enable them to realise their full potential, maximise their life chances, and to assist in the development of a better trained and qualified workforce;

- remove barriers to learning, e.g. inflexible attendance requirements; rigid entry qualifications; individual learning difficulties; programmes designed around the needs of particular target groups of learners (e.g. males) which exclude others (e.g. ethnic minorities; people with special needs);

- increase the effectiveness of learning by making it learner centred (shaped by individual starting points, needs, purposes, prior learning, preferred learning styles);

- enable people to take responsibility for their own learning, within a framework of appropriate support, in order to promote the development of adaptable, problem-solving individuals.

The shape of FE's work has tended to be determined by the forms of assessment and accreditation that are available. Hence, traditionally, FE provision has been firmly based on courses, beginning in September and ending in July, requiring attendance (full time, part time, day release) in college, to produce integrated assignments or prepare for exams. Every student was required to follow the same syllabus. It is therefore not surprising that until the advent of NCVQ, flexible learning made limited impact on the main body of FE provision. Flexible learning has tended to be characterised by separate off-site 'open-learning' centres with little or no relationship to mainstream provision and by 'drop-in' workshops (e.g. for learning support in communication or numeracy) as an *adjunct* to mainstream provision.

The advent of NVQs, independent of courses, defined in terms of outcomes rather

than inputs and independent of the characteristics of any particular client group or time constraints, is beginning to bring flexible learning centre stage for most FE colleges. If colleges are to deliver NVQs they will need to be able to provide flexible access to learning, assessment, and accreditation. This means reorganising provision in order to provide a range of new services, such as initial assessment, accreditation of prior learning/achievement (APL/A), action planning, individual learning programmes, 'top up' facilities, roll-on roll-off, assessment on demand, records of achievement, credit accumulation, work-based learning and workplace assessment.

For some years, college staff have been concerned to develop modular curricula in order to increase the flexibility of the offer and the options open to students. Progress has been limited by the lack of unit-based assessment, the absence of opportunities for credit accumulation and credit transfer, and the incompatibility of syllabuses and assessment requirements of different awarding bodies, within related subject areas. The introduction of unit-based NVQs, and GNVQs, is likely to assist in the process of increasing flexibility by modularising the curriculum.

School-leavers presenting themselves for further education in future, are likely to have very different expectations from students of an earlier generation. They will have experienced the National Curriculum, and will arrive with a personal profile of attainment within a Record of Achievement. Hence a flexible approach to the 'delivery' of their further education will be needed, in order to take account of individual starting points, aspirations and action plans. Moreover, colleges will need to be able to respond to the individual training plans of young people with Training Credits, if they are to play their part in the education and training of school -leavers, and are not to lose out on this significant source of income.

Flexible learning requires students to be active learners. There is an emphasis on the process of learning and the ability to learn, rather than on the acquisition of knowledge; an emphasis on problem-solving, on the ability to interpret situations and to take the initiative, rather than on following fixed procedures in unvarying circumstances; on the ability to obtain, relate, consider and apply information rather than on learning facts. This active approach to learning is particularly appropriate in a world in which the capabilities and potential of information technology have led to a continuing explosion of information, which therefore needs to be accessed and intelligently used by individuals, rather than stored in the human memory.

2. THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

Recent initiatives in education and training reflect the need for an active approach to learning and the need to increase achievement by means of improved access to learning, training, retraining and qualifications. The aim of these initiatives is to stimulate providers to widen access and increase responsiveness to the needs of individuals and the economy, and to encourage individuals to seek out learning and the accreditation of their competence.

The White Paper, *Employment for the 1990s* (1989), placed emphasis on assessing and meeting training needs at a local level, giving local employers substantial responsibility and involvement in training and vocational education, by the creation of Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs). The Education Reform Act (1988) required

that a minimum of 50% of the members of college governing bodies should represent employment interests. The White Paper, *Education and Training for the 21st Century* (1991), proposed that existing employer- interest governors should be supplemented by a representative of a local TEC. Local employers, in the form of TECs, are responsible for administering public investment in work-related education and training by commissioning appropriate provision to meet local labour needs. Providers of training will receive funding from TECs on the basis of qualifications (National Vocational Qualifications, ((NVQs)) or the equivalent) delivered, with the possibility of higher weightings for the delivery of higher level NVQs. The intention is to stimulate the development of a training market, using competitive tendering, based on the ability to provide cost-effective training, leading to the achievement of qualifications and placement in work.

The changes to FE proposed by the White Paper *Education and Training for the 21st Century*, are intended to raise participation and to boost achievement. Funding via the Further Education Council will include a separate element directly related to student numbers, as an incentive to expand participation. Moreover, it is proposed that new funding arrangements will encourage colleges, by means of differential weightings, to offer more opportunities for the achievement of higher level NVQs. The Further Education Council will take account of the view of TECs, drawing on the labour market and other relevant information, in order to determine for funding purposes, the kinds of education and training they consider to be appropriate for a particular college to provide. Funding for adult education via the Council will be confined to provision which leads to academic or vocational qualifications, access to higher education (HE) or to higher levels of further education (FE), improvement of basic skills, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

NVQs are designed to remove barriers which restrict access and progression. They are based on assessment of the outcomes of learning, arrived at independently of any particular mode, duration or location of learning. The fact that NVQs are expressed in outcomes rather than the specification of inputs, and can be assessed in any appropriate context (i.e. in any context where the competence can be appropriately demonstrated), represents a major challenge to colleges as traditional providers of vocational education and training. NVQs are based on demonstrations of competence in relation to national standards and this is paralleled by the development of a National Curriculum based on National Attainment Targets.

The intention to stimulate a demand for life-long access to learning and qualifications is expressed in the establishment of Training Credits and the National Record of Achievement. The White Paper states the government's intention to increase its investment in the provision of careers advice and to encourage the exploration of new options for the management of the careers service, in order to support a demand-led, rather than a supply-led approach to education and training. The need to achieve parity of esteem for academic and vocational qualifications has led to the government's proposals for the introduction of Ordinary and Advanced Diplomas, as well as general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs), as a means of bridging the academic and vocational 'divide'. GNVQs are to be unit based, enabling credit accumulation, and will be specified in terms of outcomes of learning.

3. TRANSITION TO FLEXIBLE, LEARNER-CENTRED COLLEGES

In order to implement the concept of life-long careership, by providing flexible access to learning and qualifications for anyone aged 16 or over, colleges will need to:

- develop an orientation and infrastructure to support the widening of access;
- provide an array of new services in order to establish and respond to the needs of the individual learner or client;
- take steps to remove barriers to access and achievement created by the shape of the college's own provision;
- minimise (e.g. by means of curriculum design) barriers to access and achievement created by factors beyond their control.

The development of a flexible, accessible and learner-centred college does not preclude the continuing enrolment of groups of students, with similar needs and interests, on courses. Nor is it assumed that group learning will cease. However, it is likely that flexibility and accessibility for a wider client group will need to be achieved without substantial increase in funding. Colleges will therefore need to undertake planned and co- ordinated programmes of institutional, curriculum and staff development in order to review, augment and where necessary, modify existing structures, practices and systems which currently confine access to learning and qualifications to people who can attend linear courses, offered at fixed times, and with fixed starting and assessment points.

The Education Reform Act (1988) endowed colleges with greater freedom and responsibilities in relation to finance, personnel, and the kinds of services they can provide. *Education and training for the 21st Century* (1991) outlined the government's plans for the establishment of a new FE sector and the removal of FE colleges and sixth form colleges from local authority control. A new system of funding is intended to provide incentives for colleges to increase their enrolments. Current national developments in further education and training (as outlined in (1) The Development of Flexible Learning in Further Education above) mean that colleges will need to be able to compete effectively in the 'training market'.

Colleges will, therefore, need to be responsive and flexible in meeting the requirements of the local population and labour market for education and training, and more accessible, as well as cost effective in 'delivering' qualifications.

IN THIS REPORT:

SECTION ONE describes the features of a flexible, accessible and learner-centred college, organised to meet the needs of individuals, and compares these features with those of a college organised on the basis of groups of students enrolling on conventional courses. The purpose of this comparison is to spotlight the area for development and transition. The information is presented in the form of a checklist, to enable colleges to profile their current ability to provide flexible access for individuals to learning and qualifications. A Planning Handbook, based on this checklist, is also available.

SECTION TWO describes the issues currently faced by colleges when attempting to widen access to learning and accreditation, together with key factors that have assisted progress and strategies that appear to be effective. These issues and key factors were identified through visits to 30 colleges and LEAs in Spring 1991. Cameo illustrations are provided, based on case-study material gathered from the LEAs and colleges visited.

SECTION THREE provides a summary of significant 'inhibitors to progress', with recommendations for action at a local or national level.

Note on the text

The abbreviation APL/A is used throughout Flexible colleges to indicate the assessment and accreditation of prior learning and/or achievement, in recognition of the current variations in usage. Terminology is evolving in line with increasing experience and growing clarity concerning the process itself. It may be that a quite different acronym (e.g. AEC - accreditation of existing competence) will eventually emerge as a more accurate description of the process.

SECTION 1

THE LEARNER-CENTRED COLLEGE

In order to provide life-long access to learning and qualifications, colleges will need to:

- develop an orientation and infrastructure to support the widening of access;
- provide an array of new services in order to establish and respond to the particular needs of an individual learner or client;
- take steps to remove barriers to access and achievement created by the shape of their own provision;
- minimise (e.g. by means of curriculum design) barriers to access and achievement created by factors beyond their control.

The diagram, The Flexible College, which follows, depicts the array of services that colleges will need to offer if they are going to provide more people with access to learning and qualifications. The various services provided by a college which is organised around the needs of individuals will need to be supported by an infrastructure that will encourage, rather than constrain, flexibility and the widening of access. The development and availability of such services will need to be co-ordinated, so that an individual or group of employees undertaking APL/A, for example,will be able to obtain prompt access to appropriate programmes of 'top-up' training in order to achieve the qualifications they are aiming for. The development of guidance and assessment services will therefore need to be planned and synchronised with the development of flexible access to learning, which in turn will entail changes, affecting accommodation, staffing and administrative systems.

The degree and direction of change and reorganisation that will be necessary for colleges, if a much greater proportion of the adult population are to have access to learning and qualifications, is indicated in the pages that follow. A simplified comparison between a college organised on the basis of conventional courses (the course-based college) and a college organised around the needs of individuals for flexible access to learning and assessment (the learner-centred college) is used to highlight the area for development and transition.

It is likely that neither the course-based college, nor the learner-centred college exists as described, and that features of each can be discovered in most colleges. Nor is it intended to suggest that teaching and learning on courses cannot be learner centred. The purpose of the comparison is to delineate and highlight the transition between:

- a college that is organised around the needs of groups of students, enrolling on courses that generally begin in September and end in the summer term, with learning arranged in a fixed sequence, and assessment occurring at fixed points for the whole group;

and

- a college that provides initial guidance, counselling and assessment, to establish individual starting points, requirements, and goals, and flexible access (i.e. time, place, style/mode) to learning and assessment.

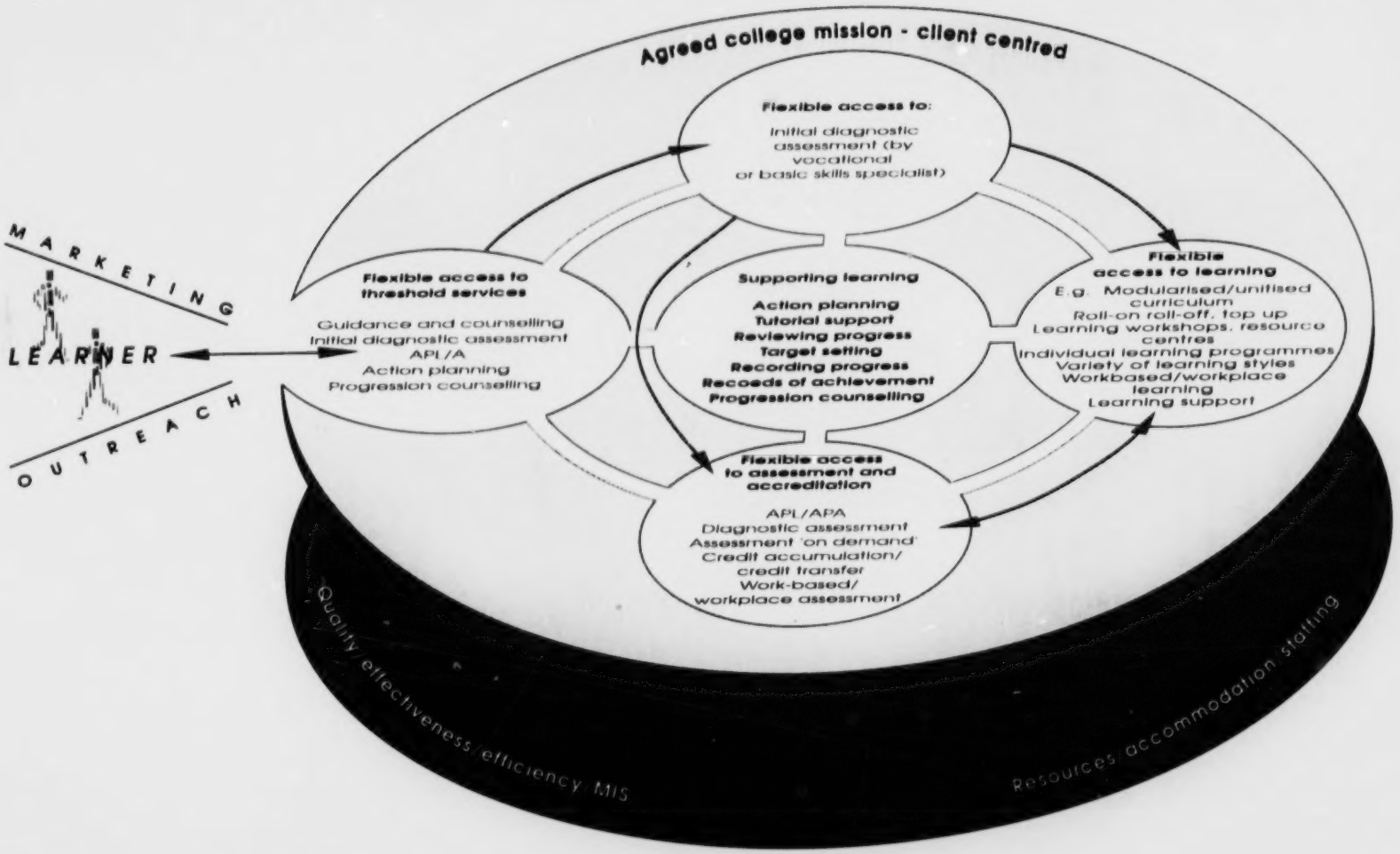
The development of a flexible, accessible and learner-centred college does not preclude the continuation of enrolment of groups of students on to courses. Nor is it assumed that group learning will cease. For many people, membership of a group is a motivating, confidence-building and enjoyable experience, and an important factor in personal development, effective learning, the achievement of qualifications, and successful career progression. However, it must be acknowledged that the traditional orientation and organisation of many colleges serve to exclude or discourage many people from seeking access to learning and qualifications. Colleges therefore need to increase and re-orientate their range of provision in order to extend access to those sections of the population who may not currently feel that learning and qualifications are 'for them'.

Section One can be used by colleges as a checklist or profile to:

- assess the extent to which they currently operate as course-based or learner-centred colleges;
- plan and measure progress towards becoming learner-centred colleges.

This checklist is also available in the form of a Planning Handbook for use by college management teams, heads of department, Unit/Section/Team leaders, cross-college co-ordinators and others, to assist in the planning and co-ordination of strategic planning, and institutional, curriculum and staff development programmes. The checklist can also be used to assist in the identification and prioritising of objectives, when considering how to deploy development funds.

THE FLEXIBLE COLLEGE



MARKETING AND OUTREACH

Colleges will need to develop a proactive marketing and outreach capability in order to:

- obtain and respond to local labour market intelligence;
- compete effectively within the adult training market;
- respond to individual Training plans.

The course-based college	✓	✓	The learner-centred college
Recruitment of traditional clientele by means of established relationships with local/regional employers, local schools, and the careers service. e.g. 16-19s on full-time courses, part-time day/block release.			Pro-active marketing capability by means of contact with, for example: ● schools ● employers (e.g. in-company APL/A) ● adult guidance services Access to local labour market intelligence provided by, for example: ● local Economic Development Units; ● TECs ● college governors College commitment to providing access to learning and accreditation for all sections of the community. Ability to identify sections of the community not currently seeking access to learning and qualifications, or currently under-represented. Ability to respond to Action Plans drawn up by managing agents, the careers service, etc. e.g. ET, YT, Training Credits
Block recruitment to a pre-determined menu of courses.			Ability to respond to demands for top-up training, stimulated by APL/A. Ability to tender effectively for contracts awarded by TECs and other commissioners of training. Recruitment by means of collaboration with adult guidance and information services. Use of High Street 'information shops', mobile information centres, etc., to provide 'career' guidance for adults and access to information on training and learning opportunities.

NB. Neither the course-based college nor the learner-centred college exists as described but features of each can be found in most colleges.

THRESHOLD SERVICES

Colleges will need to provide a range of services to enable adults to cross the threshold to learning and accreditation.
Colleges will need to provide flexible access to:

- guidance and counselling
- initial diagnostic assessment
- APL/A
- action planning
- progression counselling

The course-based college	✓	✓	The learner-centred college
Block recruitment and enrolment, in September, of groups of students on courses.			Continuous access to guidance and enrolment, throughout the year, on a drop-in basis or by appointment.
Advice confined to the availability of provision within the college or department only.			Access to comprehensive information concerning the location and availability of appropriate learning, training and assessment opportunities, in and beyond the college. Access to databases providing comprehensive information about the availability and requirements of qualifications.
Recruitment/selection of appropriate students for the courses that are offered by the college or department.			Assistance in defining and clarifying individual aspirations, purposes, and appropriate qualifications to aim for. Assistance in identifying existing skills and competences, and matching these to the requirements of relevant qualifications and job opportunities. Initial diagnostic assessment in order to establish individual aptitudes, strengths, weaknesses, training and learning needs. Access to 'expert systems' for self help, e.g. in diagnostic assessment. Assistance in defining targets for learning and assessment and in drawing up an individual action plan.
Enrolment by specialist staff in departments, for departmental provision.			Referral to vocational or subject specialists for vocationally/subject specific diagnostic assessment, action planning or assessment.
			APL/A service available: ● identification of existing competence and

NB. Neither the course-based college nor the learner-centred college exists as described but features of each can be found in most colleges.

The course-based college	✓	✓	The learner-centred college
			previous experience in relation to the requirements of qualifications ● identification of appropriate evidence ● assistance with portfolio preparation ● assessment of existing competence ● arrangements for 'top-up' training/further learning.
			Threshold services provided in a congenial and accessible adult environment.
			The establishment of threshold services co-ordinated with the development and availability of related services in the college, e.g. roll-on roll-off access to the curriculum; workshop learning; assessment on demand.
			Threshold services resourced as an important element of college provision, but without the expectation that an individual making use of threshold services, will necessarily 'enroll' in other provision at the college. Threshold services costed and priced. Threshold services perhaps part-funded and/or staffed by other agencies, e.g. TEC, Careers Service, training access points (TAPs). Management information systems (MIS) and administration systems in place to support continuous enrolment. Appropriate performance indicators developed for threshold services.

FLEXIBLE ACCESS TO LEARNING

Colleges will need to provide flexible access to learning to meet individual starting points, requirements and purposes.

For example:

- modularised/unitised curriculum
- roll-on, roll-off
- top-up
- learning workshops, resource centres
- individual learning programmes
- learning and resource-based workshops
- variety of learning styles/ opportunities
- assignments, study guides
- access to specialist staff
- work-based/workplace learning
- learning support

The course-based college	✓	✓	The learner-centred college
Learning by means of attendance on a course.			A portfolio of alternative modes of access to learning and accreditation available. 'Mixed-mode' provision available whereby learners will have access to styles of learning to suit the preferences of the learner and the characteristics of the task. Mixed-mode provision will include: ● learning in a group ● taught classes and lectures ● learning and resource-based workshops ● distance learning ● work-based/place learning ● simulation Availability of multiple pathways (via modules/units and modes of study) to achieve a variety of qualifications.
Enrolment dependent on: ● ability to meet entry requirements ● availability of a place ● viable numbers to run the course			
The shape of the course determined by the requirements for assessment.			Individual learning programmes built around the needs and aspirations of the individual learner.
Assessment and accreditation only available as part of a course.			Curriculum modularised/unitised, and based on competences, learning outcomes or learning objectives. Unit credits and credit accumulation available.
NB. Neither the course-based college nor the learner-centred college exists as described but features of each can be found in most colleges.			

The course-based college	✓	✓	The learner-centred college
Courses generally begin in September and end in the early summer.			Roll-on, roll-off access to modules/units available, supported by induction, target setting, review, and recording of progress and achievements.
Syllabus is taught by a teacher in a fixed sequence. All students follow the same programme at the same time.			Modularised/unitised curriculum, learning workshops and the availability of appropriate assignments, enable individuals to undertake learning and assessment at their own pace, in college or elsewhere, to meet their own needs and purposes. Teachers skilled as 'learning' managers able to assess individual needs, agree individual targets, provide appropriate learning opportunities, monitor and review progress; assess achievement. Emphasis on active learning rather than teaching.
Groups are taught in classrooms. Learning workshops are available for practical subjects or 'remedial' support only.			Access to 'mainstream' curriculum by means of attendance at learning workshops. Learning workshops equipped with good quality learning materials and resources enable individuals to attend at times to suit their own convenience, to undertake assignments at their own pace, and to meet their own learning needs and goals. Learning and resource-based workshops are adequately supported and serviced by learning resources managers and by learning support staff (clerical/technical).
Some provision of learning support (e.g. ESOL, numeracy) to enable learners to make maximum progress. Access to learning and achievement is impeded by barriers, e.g. ● inflexible attendance times ● entry qualifications based on formal academic qualifications only			Learning support (e.g. ESOL, numeracy) is available to enable learners to make maximum progress. Barriers that impede achievement and access to learning are identified and addressed, e.g. ● inflexible attendance times; ● entry qualifications based on formal academic achievements only; ● failure to provide language or numeracy support; ● physical barriers, e.g to wheelchair access; ● need for childcare facilities.

The course-based college	✓	✓	The learner-centred college
Learning is expected to take place in classrooms on college premises.			Opportunities for work-based and workplace learning are well developed, e.g. provision of realistic (simulated) work situations in college; development of assignments that can be undertaken in the workplace; collaboration between college staff and workplace supervisors.
MIS, administration and resourcing systems based on the concept of enrolment of groups of students on courses with fixed yearly attendance and assessment patterns. Performance indicators are based on the concept of enrolment of groups of students on to courses with fixed entry, assessment and exit points.			MIS, administration and resourcing systems developed to support a variety of models of learning, and flexible access to assessment. Performance indicators recognise a variety of modes of learning and utilisation of college resources.

FLEXIBLE ACCESS TO ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION

Colleges will need to provide flexible access to assessment.

Flexible access to:

- APL/A
- diagnostic assessment
- credit accumulation/credit transfer
- assessment 'on demand'
- work-based/workplace assessment

The course-based college	✓	✓	The learner-centred college
Access to assessment and accreditation by means of selection and enrolment on to a course of study. Selection on to a course leading to accreditation, based on the ability to meet entry criteria proved by means of previous qualifications or an entry test.			Initial diagnostic assessment available in order to establish individual aptitudes, strengths, weakness and training/learning needs. Diagnostic assessment of individuals, by skilled specialist staff available. APL/A services available: ● assistance in identifying qualifications relevant to previous experience and future goals; ● assistance in identifying previous experience and existing competence relevant to assessment requirements; ● assistance in preparing for assessment; ● assessment by qualified vocational specialist in the college or at the workplace. APL/A service costed and priced.
Assessment and accreditation generally only available as a result of enrolling on a course of study. Assessment may be integral to the course, or available only at fixed times (e.g. once or twice a year, at the end of the course). Accreditation may include requirements for specified hours of study.			Assessment 'on demand' available when an individual is 'ready'. Registration is for assessment of *existing* competence (e.g. elements, units, or a whole qualification).
Assessment predominantly by means of written tests of knowledge and practical tests of skills. Written tests of knowledge based on 'unseen questions' require all candidates to be assessed simultaneously.			Assessment of outcomes, regardless of how competence acquired. Assessment of competent performance underpinned by knowledge and understanding.

NB. Neither the course-based college nor the learner-centred college exists as described but features of each can be found in most colleges.

The course-based college	✓	✓	The learner-centred college
Accreditation available for whole qualification only (i.e. unit credits not available).			Availability of unit credits, credit transfer, credit accumulation.
Assessment required to take place at a registered 'centre', e.g. candidates take written exam on college premises under controlled conditions. Papers assessed by the Awarding Body. ● College staff 'licensed' to undertake assessment, as employees of an 'Approved Centre'. Awarding Body monitors the quality of learning and assessment opportunities provided, and moderates and validates the results.			Assessment can take place in any setting where competent performance can be appropriately demonstrated. Opportunities available for assessment in realistic work environments, to meet NCVQ criteria. Evidence of prior achievement can be assessed by means of portfolio. College staff, and workplace supervisors accredited as assessors and internal verifiers to meet the requirements of Awarding bodies, and as a means of guaranteeing quality assurance.

SUPPORTING LEARNING

Colleges will need to provide mechanisms for supporting learners on individual learning programmes:

e.g.

action planning
tutorial support
review of progress
target setting
recording progress
records of achievement
progression counselling

The course-based college	✓	✓	The learner-centred college
Support mechanisms are provided on a group basis, e.g. ● tutor group sessions ● induction Tutorial support and tutorial time are provided for full-time students only. Individual action planning and target setting are unnecessary because enrolment on to a course (with syllabus and end testing) determines the learning that needs to be undertaken by every student.			Guidance, counselling and tutorial support are central to the whole learning and assessment experience, providing definition, direction, coherence and cohesion to individual learning programmes. Individual learning programmes are held together by a recurring cycle of target setting, review of progress, recording progress and achievement, renewed target setting. Individual learning needs, purposes and starting points established by means of guidance, counselling and initial assessment. Individual learning programmes determined by means of diagnostic assessment and action planning.
Tutorial support (e.g. personal and social development, 'problems', welfare) is seen as separate from learning, although it may include review of progress.			Guidance, counselling, action planning and tutorial support integral to the whole learning and assessment experience for all learners, and supported by the development of a life-long Record of Achievement.
'Careers' advice is provided by specialist staff, separate from the learning process and for the purpose of progression only.			Learner support services include 'threshold services' and progression counselling and underpin the learning and assessment cycle.
Teachers are accustomed to work with students as members of groups.			Vocational/subject specialists are skilled in one-to-one tutorial work with adults and able to undertake individual diagnostic assessment, target setting, reviewing and recording progress as basic 'tools of their trade'.

NB. Neither the course-based college nor the learner-centred college exists as described but features of each can be found in most colleges.

The course-based college	✓	✓	The learner-centred college
Learners have access to a range of support services provided by the college and LEA, e.g. college counsellor, student adviser, careers guidance.			Learners have easy access to a range of specialist guidance services (e.g. adult guidance officers, information officers, advisers, counsellors) provided by a variety of agencies, and supported by appropriate technology.
Student records, MIS and administration systems are organised on the basis of enrolment and attendance by groups of students on courses, generally lasting a year.			Computerised recording systems and MIS (e.g. the use of bar codes and smart cards) are in use to administer, track and support individual learning programmes, held together by recurring guidance cycles (reviewing and recording progress, target setting).

INFRASTRUCTURE

Colleges will need to develop an orientation and infrastructure that support the widening of access to learning, assessment and qualifications.

Widening access will require decisions affecting:

- policy
- strategy
- resou[illegible]g
- staffing
- accommodation
- quality
- efficiency

The course-based college	✓	✓	The learner-centred college
The college is organised to recruit and meet the needs of traditional/existing client groups, e.g. 16-19, part-time, day and block release.			College commitment to widening access to learning and qualifications post 19, and to increasing participation and attainment 16-19, is expressed in a mission statement and backed up by strategy.
Schemes of delegation and internal systems for resource deployment are based on historical models and conventional forms of provision. Funding formulae based on FTEs, use weightings that discourage alternative modes of delivery. Lack of knowledge about units costs leads to an inability to set prices, and identify resources necessary to provide new services. Deployment of resources to courses is based on historical precedent			Approaches to funding and deployment of resources that encourage flexible access to learning and accreditation are established, e.g. ● funding formulae under schemes of delegation that encourage colleges to provide flexible access; ● costing and pricing of all aspects of provision; ● identification of resources to provide new services, e.g. capital start-up costs of developing materials offset by sales to other colleges; ● new models for the internal deployment of resources, e.g. on the basis of units of achievement 'delivered'.
Clear demarcation between teaching and non-teaching staff, affecting roles, responsibilities, pay and conditions. Teaching staff deployed on the basis of timetabled class contact hours, during the academic year only.			Deployment of staff in new ways in order to provide the new services effectively and efficiently. Flexible staff providing flexible access throughout the year.
Appropriate accommodation for groups of students and conventional modes of learning, teaching, and assessment, e.g. ● classrooms ● large examinations hall			Building works necessary in order to provide appropriate accommodation for new services and modes of delivery, e.g. ● one-to-one interview rooms ● learning workshops ● threshold services

NB. Neither the course-based college nor the learner-centred college exists as described but features of each can be found in most colleges.

The course-based college	✓	✓	The learner-centred college
Performance indicators designed to measure the quality and efficiency of a teaching and learning model based on courses (Sept.-July) and conventional attendance/delivery modes, e.g. ● staff/student ratios (SSRs) ● course retentions/completions			Development of appropriate performance indicators to measure, maintain and improve access to learning and achievement in colleges. Development of appropriate indicators to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the new range of learner-centred services. Learners with an active role in evaluating the quality of the services provided.
MIS and administration systems designed to support enrolment on year-long courses (Sept.-July) and conventional modes of attendance and delivery.			Establishment of appropriate MIS and administration systems that will support and facilitate the management of flexible access to learning and qualifications, and at the same time provide a helpful service to learners, e.g. ● computer printouts of credits achieved ● smart cards

SECTION 2

TRANSITION TO LEARNER-CENTRED COLLEGES

The changes to which this report refers are of some magnitude and cannot be implemented overnight. Some colleges are proceeding faster than others; few, if any, have completed the transition to learner-centred colleges, able to provide the full range of interdependent services outlined in Section One.

The intention is not to destroy successful provision for existing client groups but to refocus and augment provision in order to increase access for people who currently feel that learning and achievement are not 'for them', or who are otherwise discouraged or excluded.

There are a number of barriers to change, issues arising and factors that facilitate or hinder the widening of access which this section seeks to identify. While there are some colleges which could make interesting detailed case studies of change processes in action, they would be the first to recognise that their transition is incomplete. It was therefore felt that issues were best illustrated by short cameo examples of current practice in a wide range of colleges which, taken together, provide a more complete picture.

Drawing illustrations from a large number of sources is also intended to demonstrate that change is occurring across many fronts simultaneously within the FE service and to recognise that many examples of good and interesting practice occur in colleges which could not be covered within the timescale of this project.

Thus Section Two provides a list of key factors, barriers to progress and transitional issues which affect the widening of acess to learning and qualifications in FE.

They are grouped under three major headings:

- strategic management
- curriculum management
- operational management

and illustrated by extensive case studies of current practice.

STRATEGY - Key factors and issues

- In order to make progress there needs to be a consensus throughout the college concerning the need to widen access to learning and qualifications for adults, as well as the need to increase levels of participation and achievement among 16-19s.

- Learner-centredness needs to be absorbed into the culture of the institution so that if the principal (or another prime mover) left tomorrow, this ethos and way of working would be embedded and would continue. A long-term development strategy is therefore needed.

- The extent to which there is cross-college ownership of vision depends on participation in decision making and good communication systems.

- Progress towards flexibility and accessibility is assisted by sound linking of mission statements, strategic development plans and structured action plans.

- The extensive changes required to bring about increased flexibility and accessibility cannot be realised within a single college year and therefore action plans must provide for phased transition in which there is appropriate sequencing of innovative developments.

- Discrete approaches to institutional development, curriculum development and staff development should be replaced by a co-ordinated approach within a total college strategy.

- Patterns of transition to learner-centred organisations vary. Some colleges seek to make incremental progress evenly across all areas of the curriculum. Others use funded development projects, targeted pilots, or 'flag-ship' developments to spearhead change.

- In many colleges substantial progress in a single programme area has served as a model for a whole college policy.

- Colleges which are up to (or above) target full-time equivalents have little incentive to widen access because of the financial penalties that result from exceeding targets when operating under FTE-funding formulae.

- Colleges which continue to define their primary client groups as 16-19s or part-time day release students attending in groups, and which are experiencing no difficulty in recruiting their target FTEs, do not, as yet, seem to feel any need to widen access.

- Measurement of college performance in terms of outcomes may provide greater incentive to widen access, especially if performance indicators identify particular target groups currently under-represented in the student body.

- Many colleges have recently experienced a decrease in part-time enrolments (e.g. part-day release) due to the recession, and cutbacks by employers in training and staffing levels. However, this fall in part-time enrolments has coincided with a rise in full-time enrolments so that colleges have not felt the need to reconsider their provision in order to maintain FTEs.

- Strategies for future development should increasingly reflect the growing blurring of the lines of division between mainstream work-related further education and adult education.

- An audit by colleges of the local availability of assessment and top-up training opportunities may provide a useful stimulus and be a catalyst for curriculum development.

- Localised development projects and pilots in colleges will have little impact unless they form part of the development of a curriculum framework for the whole college. It is not enough to modularise courses, without taking account of the potential for multi-routes between courses and across curriculum areas.

- The perception of flexible/open learning as a peripheral college activity and alternative form of provision for students who are unable to attend courses, may inhibit colleges' vision of what can be achieved.

- The shape of provision in FE has always been strongly influenced by the forms of accreditation that are operating. The extent to which colleges move towards widening access to learning and qualifications will probably depend to a great extent on the achievement of a 'critical mass' of NVQs in the qualifications market.

- Opportunities exist for co-ordinating some of the new services at the college threshold with TEC initiatives in the area of information and advice provision.

STRATEGY - Examples

A college's mission

In seeking to achieve its mission, Rotherham College has set itself a substantial number of objectives, including:

- providing flexible access and delivery systems which facilitate individual learning programmes and are focused on the needs and aspirations of individuals;
- utilising counselling, guidance and support services to maximise the personal effectiveness of students and trainees so that their college experience leads to successful intended outcomes;
- mapping and developing progression routes into, within and beyond the college.

A college's strategic priorities

In the light of its mission, Milton Keynes College states its strategic priorities as:

'... to create a college which by 1994 will:

- be a bigger college with increased student participation and higher levels of attainment;
- provide a learner-led service which diagnoses individual need and assesses prior achievement;
- offer a range of learning options, support and accreditation;
- comprise a flexible working environment which values people and technology.

These strategic priorities are supported by objectives to be achieved by 1994, which include:

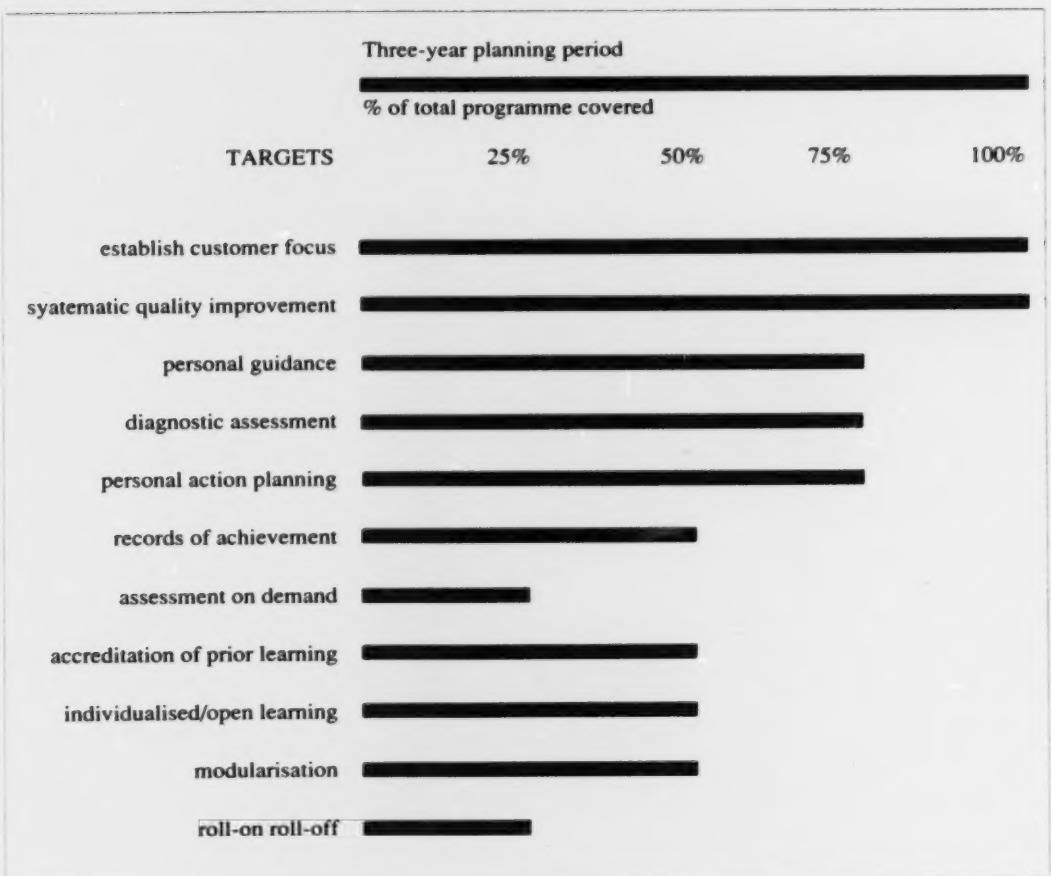
- the establishment of a learning centre underpinning open access to the curriculum and accelerated learning opportunities;
- the establishment of an assessment and accreditation service marketed and available to learners inside and outside the College;
- projects which reflect research and development needs of the College;
- the improvement of recruitment and selection procedures so that they value learner differences;

and performance indicators that include:

- evidence that an increased number of learners are achieving their targets;
- evidence that we have moved further towards more student-centred and flexible approaches to learning;
- evidence that staff support change and innovation and wish to participate in it.'

Flexibility targets

In its three-year strategic development plan, Croydon College has set out a number of flexibility targets.



A phased five-year target

Craven College currently has a five-year target to provide an individual route for every entrant by 1995. During the first two years of its plan (1990-92), the College aims to set up a central admissions system, develop a quality control procedure and undertake curriculum modularisation where it is NVQ driven. This will provide stability during a transitional period before the rest of the curriculum is modularised.

A five-year action plan

Wirral Metropolitan College believes that a strongly communicated vision of comprehensive arrangements to generate and optimise personal achievement enables a college to revitalise its talent and resources. However, it also believes that for most colleges change cannot wait until the underlying values and principles have been thoroughly worked through and subscribed to. An interactive and reciprocal process is needed which involves rapid practical activity alongside, and integrated with, the refinement of ideas and open communication. Wirral has therefore formulated a five-year action plan:

- to create a College which is strikingly ahead of its current image and activity;
- to plan and implement a central admissions service;
- to plan and introduce a range of student support services including counselling, study centres, careers centres and work placement units;
- to plan, introduce and evaluate a universally available core curriculum framework which includes continuing experience and achievement in communication, mathematics, IT and science;
- to plan and introduce individual learning programmes for all major vocational routes, based upon learning centres;
- to plan, introduce and evaluate assessment on demand for the core, individual and open learning programmes, and a selection of vocational competences;
- to design and introduce a summative assessment and certification service which links with the range of qualifications currently on offer, and those which will emerge through NCVQ and the School Examinations and Assessment Council (SEAC);
- to plan and introduce an exit and transfer service;
- to develop the College's marketing practices to include family and weekend learning summer schools, and assessment and placement services for employers;
- to exchange and disseminate information and experience for the benefit of the College, its users and clients, and the service generally.

Development plans

At Milton Keynes College, Development Managers for Assessment and Accreditation have been appointed to undertake exploration, to review relevant external developments, to draw up a development plan for the college, and to work with curriculum managers and course team leaders. Approximately £1,000,000 has been invested in establishing a Learner Centre at the Bletchley site in order to act as a 'flagship', as well as a 'test-bed', for Initial Diagnostic Assessment within the college. Staff from across the College will be seconded to work alongside staff experienced in workshop methodology, in the new Learning Centre, as a means of staff development. Within five to six years it is hoped to have learning centres on all the College sites.
The College has an Assistant Director for Marketing and Development who leads a team of 12 development managers. In addition, leaders of short-term development projects (externally funded or from a college or LEA development fund) are

appointed from within the College by means of advertisement and interview. Development projects are given a high profile both within and beyond the College by regular publication of bulletins.

Unco-ordinated developments

Some colleges with well developed flexible learning delivery systems do not have the threshold services necessary to make their excellent facilities accessible to a wider clientele. Other colleges have excellent threshold facilities but become victims of their own success, either through a build-up of waiting lists for guidance sessions or because they have not yet developed flexible delivery systems that enable them to respond quickly to identified needs.

An LEA strategy

Croydon LEA's strategy is to encourage the development of a range of delivery structures which will contribute to promoting access and participation by all clients. 'In particular it will be necessary to recognise that the majority of clients of all ages will not wish to spend long periods of continuous institution-based study to achieve their goals. Especially, but not exclusively, older people will require possibilities for short periods of study, mixed study modes, and learning support so that they may accumulate credits towards a qualification over a period related to their work and domestic arrangements. It is recognised that maximum flexibility may not be achievable by all providers, and that some will wish to concentrate on particular market segments. Nevertheless, they may wish to review their offer to consider which additional flexibilities are desirable.'

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE - Key factors and Issues

- Widening access to learning and accreditation has significant implications for the roles of all college staff. Senior management teams, for example, should include managers of finance, administration, MIS, and buildings in addition to curriculum and marketing managers.

- A new hybrid breed of staff (with neither conventional lecturer nor support staff job specification) is emerging in some colleges to take the new roles associated with flexible access to learning and accreditation.

- Appropriate involvement of all staff (teaching, non-teaching or 'hybrid') in the planning and decision-making process will be necessary to secure ownership of and commitment to change processes.

- Organisational structures will need to reflect the new range of services illustrated by the learner-centred organisation diagram.

- Flexible colleges require flexible staff.

- Some colleges have taken a positive decision to move towards a flatter organisational structure as a prelude to implementing change. Such structures facilitate horizontal communication and the effectiveness of staff in cross-college roles.

Devolution of management responsibility

East Birmingham College equipped itself for a period of change by a major revision of its management structure. The College has no heads of department, but has four vice principals and 12 senior lecturers responsible for various programme areas and/or cross-college roles. This devolution of management responsibility has reduced staffing costs and helped to fund the improved learning environment in the college. All staff have an hour off timetable from 9 a.m. on Fridays for Course Team meetings. Wider college issues can be fed into these meetings for discussion to secure ownership of change. All non-teaching staff are able to attend course team meetings as part of the team building/decision ownership process.

Hinckley College also embarked on a change process involving planned change to its organisational structure. The change process was introduced by the Principal through the College Corporate Plan and the brief given to a newly appointed Vice-Principal. Thereafter, the planning process was highly devolved, focusing on twelve new senior lecturer posts. An investment of £50,000 in the current year is being made in the management skills of this group. Transformation has been initiated on all fronts including threshold services and flexible delivery.

New cross-college teams

In the Credit Accumulation project at the College of North East London, it became clear at an early stage that modularisation on any significant scale had vital implications for institutional structure. The needs identified can be recognised in some of the cross-college structures in the newly-emerging college, especially the Admissions and Initial Guidance Team and the Learning Resources Team.

New posts with learner-centred college responsibilities

Greenhill College has recently created the new post of Director of Advice and Guidance (counselling and admissions). The aim is to support a cross-college client-centred guidance and admissions unit.

Newcastle College has recently added to its staffing establishment, the post of College Curriculum Development Officer, with specific responsibility for assisting the College to move towards student-centred learning processes.

Organisational structures designed to support development

The organisational structure at Milton Keynes College reflects a major investment in development, and represents a recognition that development is an on-going process. Staff (both teaching and non-teaching) are organised into teams led by curriculum managers, development managers and resource managers. These managers, in turn, report to one of three assistant directors responsible for Curriculum and Learning strategies, Marketing and Development, Finance and Resources, respectively.

At Croydon College, support services such as Customer Focus Development, Curriculum Support and Development, Learning Resources, Customer Services,

College Information Centre, Student Services, Marketing and Research are brought together in a single College Development Services Faculty.

Flatter structures

Wirral Metropolitan College has a relatively 'flat' organisational structure with 70 middle managers heading curriculum areas and a number of key lateral posts designed to support students, teaching and learning. Many of these posts are located within an entirely cross-college services faculty which manages a wide range of flexible learning facilities.

FUNDING, RESOURCING AND PRICING - Key factors and issues

- FTE formulae weightings based on conventional modes of delivery seriously penalise those colleges committed to providing greater flexibility.

- Confusion between modes of attendance and modes of learning within some schemes of delegation can act as a serious resource deterrent to colleges seeking to expand flexible access, e.g. the use of flexible learning as a mode of attendance rather than a mode of learning can result in a FTE weighting as low as .075, which takes no account of the use of workshop facilities by the learner or the investment of teacher time in the preparation of learning materials.

- Funding of colleges based on FTEs fails to take account of the comprehensive guidance and support services required and the additional administrative work engendered by provision of flexible approaches to learning and accreditation.

- Colleges are expending energy on developing a wide variety of complex formulae, based on notional equivalences (e.g. based on 'average study time'), in an attempt to deliver flexible access to learning and assessment in the context of traditional systems of funding and external monitoring requirements based on inappropriate efficiency indicators.

- Colleges and LEAs are still exploring the new opportunities and challenges presented by ERA. The sheer complexity of the issues in relation to external funding, delegated budgets and the costing, resourcing and pricing of new services, is a significant inhibitor to progress.

- Models of funding and resourcing based on units of achievement may be more compatible with widening of access than the current model based on FTEs.

- Some college staff have expressed initial apprehension about the possible consequences of resourcing based on achievements of unit credits. Their fear is that this could mean 'payment by results', narrowly defined as success in achieving academic and vocational qualifications, thereby ignoring important aspects of personal development not recognised by a formal qualification but fundamental to a student's progress and progression.

- The development of a responsive and accessible college could well be assisted by internal delegation of budgets to programme areas. Allocation of resources to these

programme areas, on the basis of target numbers of unit credits, may act as a powerful incentive to unitise the curriculum and thus increase flexibility.

- Colleges are finding it difficult to envisage a system which allocates resources on the basis of learning outcomes, but which does not base the cost of learning on expenditure of 'lecturer time'.

- Colleges will be expected to find ways of funding the new range of services from current levels of resources, supplemented by cost recovery and income generation.

- Without an accurate means of establishing and comparing costs, it is difficult to arrive at a reliable price. However, it will be important to price services realistically in order to thrive, or at least survive, within the current ethos of competitive tendering.

- There is currently much experimentation and wide variation in the pricing of new services. This is resulting in some striking anomalies both within an individual college, and between colleges in the same locality. Moreover learners may be charged more for APL/A than if they had enrolled on a full-time course.

- Because there are no generally accepted models for ascertaining the costs of the new services associated with learner-centred organisations, it is difficult to compare the costs of 'conventional' and 'flexible' modes of delivery.

- In accepting a learner with a Training Credit, colleges are, in effect, accepting a contract to deliver a qualification (or unit thereof) rather than simply enroll a learner on a course.

- Flexible access to learning requires that the teacher is not the only learning resource. There is likely to be a greater demand for photocopying equipment, computer hardware and learning packages. However, many colleges are still funding areas of work at traditional levels based on the demands of traditional learning styles, (i.e. chalk, talk and handouts!).

- Many colleges are now actively generating income by the development of learning materials for sale or by charging for tutorial services. However, in some colleges, there is no mechanism for 'ploughing back' these resources into the areas of work that generated them, in order to stimulate further development.

- In cases where there is, in effect, a monopoly over qualifications, (e.g. when a Lead Body is also operating as the Examinating and Validating Board), complex licensing and fee structures, together with the level of fees, could act as financial barriers. Colleges may be deterred from offering such qualifications if the fees for registration, licensing or training of workplace assessors are too high, and levied too frequently.

FUNDING, RESOURCING AND PRICING - Examples

Encouragement through internal budget allocations

At Newcastle College, departments are encouraged rather than compelled to make greater use of flexible learning in their mainstream provision. Effective encouragement is engineered through the internal budget allocation. The College points out that since it is unlikely that funding will increase in real terms, it follows

that no additional resources will be available to assist it to respond to the demands of learner-centred provision. The College reminds all its sections that if resource demands arising out of the new approach are to be accommodated, there must be a corresponding reduction in the level of resource allocated to conventional approaches.

Resourcing flexibility

The following statement is taken from the Croydon LEA Strategic Plan 1990-93:

Provision should be available in as many delivery and learning modes as possible to ensure maximum flexibility and accessibility for clients. Providers will be encouraged and assisted to broaden the range of delivery and learning modes available in response to clients' needs. This strategy will require the development of learning support services including guidance, initial assessment, and tutoring. The costs of these must be met both from economies arising from employing more cost-effective learning methods, and from increased income generated by greater client-centredness.

If resources are to be allocated internally on the basis of targets for units of achievement, these targets can be set for programme areas and not individual teachers. It is then possible to offset units which are expensive to deliver against units which are cheap to deliver, and to take account of the needs of learners who need a greater or lesser degree of support.

Achievement-led resourcing

To take forward its strategy, Croydon LEA, with Croydon College, is pursuing a research project funded by FEU. The aims involve establishing 'units of achievement' covering academic, vocational, and general educational attainments. These would include NVQ units and modules or units of academic qualifications such as 'A' levels. Units of achievement will then be related to different delivery modes for costing purposes. It is thus hoped to establish a relationship between clients' achievements by different modes which could be used as the basis for agreeing targets and contracts with providers. It is intended that contracting will relate to numbers of participants and their intended achievements. No date has yet been set for this, since some issues remain to be resolved. Although the project has not involved the actual distribution of resources, it concludes that deployment of resources on the basis of units of credit is a feasible model for college resourcing.

An 'achievement-led resourcing' project at the Wirral Metropolitan College has suggested a model whereby resources would be allocated internally for target numbers of unit credits. Levels of resources would be adjusted four times a year on the basis of actual units of credit achieved. This would also provide the basis for a system of efficiency indicators.

LB/EVB monopolies

One LB, which also operates as the sole EVB, insists that premises must be licensed for the purposes of work-based accreditation. Licensing is annual and costs £480. Moreover, workplace assessors must be trained and licensed at a cost of £600 per person. Some colleges are concerned that high assessment costs may undermine attempts to widen access which the introduction of NVQs would otherwise facilitate.

- Staff development should be strategically linked with curriculum development and institutional development.

- Staff development programmes should be provided for all staff - management, teaching, administrative, support - to ensure whole college commitment to flexibility and an understanding of its purposes.

- New methods of working require additional collaborative and teamwork skills. Staff development activity involving teaching and support staff together may facilitate these processes.

- In order to assist the widening of access to learning and qualifications for individuals within a locality, it may be helpful to involve members of a number of complementary provider organisations in development projects or staff development programmes, e.g. TEC staff, college staff, careers service staff.

- Successful initiatives within colleges need to be visible, if good practice or enthusiasm is to spread by example. Curriculum initiatives and development projects therefore need to be spread across college sites and areas of the curriculum. Alternatively, members of staff from a number of different curriculum areas or college sites need to be brought together into project teams.

- Staff need to be able to see the results of development projects and staff development, or they will not wish to be involved in the future.

- Teachers have been accustomed to working with groups rather than individuals and to giving information rather than facilitating learning. Many are used to 16-19-year-olds and have limited experience of working one-to-one with adult learners.

- In some colleges, resources have been invested in major building works to create learning workshops, but teachers are using them like ordinary classrooms. Even trapezoidal tables can be made to face the front.

- 'Flatter' organisational structures impose new demands on middle managers and course team leaders in colleges for which they need appropriate staff development.

- Decentralised planning of the curriculum provides opportunities for team building and the development of middle managers,as well as promoting ownership of change.

- There needs to be a flexible form of accreditation of staff development which reflects the flexibility of provision within a college.

- The development of national standards-based qualifications for staff development and perhaps initial teacher training in FE, (using the Training and Development Lead Body ((TDLB)), the Management Charter Initiative ((MCI)) and other relevant standards), is likely to have great impact on staff understanding of the processes involved in flexible, student-centred learning and the assessment of competence.

- College staff undertaking the assessment of NVQs, APL/A or with responsibility for co-ordinating the assessment process, will need appropriate staff development and access to accreditation based on the TDLB assessor standards. College staff who are likely to have a role in training or supervising workplace learning supervisors and assessors, will also need access to training and accreditation.

- Related staff development should be an integral part of all externally funded projects and this element should be closely monitored and evaluated, as well as the outcomes of the project.

- A wide range of modes should be employed in staff development - including in-house, action-based programmes, external provision and a significant use of networking with other colleges in which experience can be shared.

- It is difficult to relate to the future when the present is so pressing. In seeking change, it is important that those who design staff development activities acknowledge the value and effectiveness of what has gone before and create opportunities for exploration of the circumstances that make change necessary.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT - Examples

Recognising the importance of staff development

The report of the Credit Accumulation Project at the College of North East London stresses that both the College and the LEA should recognise that it is necessary for any further modularisation to be planned in tandem with resources for a programme of training for associated staff and managers. Staff from the Business Sector of the College comment that 'on-the-job' staff development is beneficial but very nerve racking, and needs to be supported and structured.

Integration of staff development and curriculum development

The document outlining the staff development policy of Craven College emphasises the need for the development programme to be curriculum-led arising from the needs of the changing curriculum and matching these with the College Development Plan.

Residential staff development

At Blackpool College, staff development for APL/A was provided through a three-day residential course. This was given priority not only because staff needed to be assisted in acquiring the skills involved in APL/A, but because the College felt it essential that staff have 'ownership' of any new systems intro- duced, and there was - amongst some - a fear of losing students through APL/A.

Experiential APL/A in accrediting staff development

Wakefield College has recently forged a link with Leeds Polytechnic resulting in a college-based staff development scheme validated through the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA). A significant number of college staff are now following study programmes of varying lengths leading to a range of qualifications from Certificate to Master's Level. Programmes include individual study and distance learning, and APL/A is an important element.

Joint staff development activities

The distinction between teaching and non-teaching staff at Milton Keynes has been consciously minimised, and the development of a partnership encouraged. Middle managers, both teaching and non-teaching, are part of the same team. Non-teaching staff are entitled to participate in all staff development activities.

Staff experience of learning flexibly

A group of staff drawn from the departments of Stockport College to assist in the provision of an advisory service for potential learners has completed the Open College course Making Sense of Marketing. Self-study was supported by regular group tutorials led by group members in turn. The group's final evaluation of the course was uniformly favourable, with typical comments such as:

- ' It was good to be able to work at your own pace and to fit the work round other commitments.'
- 'The combination of self-study package, supporting video material and group tutorial was an ideal combination.'

The group recommended staff development by flexible learning.

The experience of the field trials of TDLB standards in the FE sector demonstrated the enormous value for staff development of staff experiencing the process of initial diagnostic assessment and APL/A in relation to their own work.

CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT

THRESHOLD SERVICES - Key factors and issues

Advice and guidance

- The boundary between threshold services provided by a college and other information advice and guidance services (e.g. TECs and Careers Service) is currently indistinct and may become more so as threshold provision in colleges becomes more sophisticated.

- LEAs and TECs need to work collaboratively to provide a careers service for adults. Colleges can play a part in the provision of such a service but are not themselves in a position to provide or co-ordinate a comprehensive adult guidance service, bringing together the various agencies involved.

- Many LEA Careers Services do not currently include adults in their remit.

- Who will fund the provision of adult guidance: the TEC, the LEA or both (i.e. joint funding)?

- 'Careers' counselling and advice for adults need to be provided in a congenial 'adult' environment.

- Threshold guidance services are likely to draw more adults if they are visible to

the local community rather than tucked away e.g. in portable huts in a college car park, or at the rear of old school buildings used as a college annexe. However, the cost of establishing and maintaining a High Street 'shop' front may be prohibitive.

- Where adult guidance centres are provided, they are, in some cases, stimulating a demand they cannot immediately meet. This can result in lengthy waiting times, between initial contact with the centre and the date of an appointment for interview.

- Unless a college is able to meet demands for such provision as roll-on roll-off enrolment and top-up training, effective threshold services will create queues of frustrated people unable to fulfil their individual action plans, awaiting 'infill' places, or causing a crisis of oversubscription in September.

- Some TECs are considering offering vouchers to adults for guidance and counselling. This could affect the commitment of funds to the provision of a guidance service for all adults since some, e.g. women returners not registered as unemployed, may be ineligible for vouchers. Moreover, vouchers could have the effect of putting guidance agencies in competition with one another, causing unnecessary duplication of effort rather than the collaborative establishment of comprehensive networks.Initial Assessment

Initial assessment

- Initial assessment and diagnosis may be regarded as a function of a central guidance service or it may be the responsibility of other staff with vocational specialisms.

- Where diagnostic tests are applied there appears to be a variety of tests in use, with no consistency from one college to another.

- There is a requirement for systematic care to be taken in the way in which the results of initial assessment and diagnosis are fed into an admissions procedure.

- Limited use is currently made of computerised 'expert systems' for initial and diagnostic assessment, although clearly, the potential is considerable, especially for self-assessment and reducing costs. The quality and effectiveness of such programmes need to be evaluated, and their availability publicised and extended.

Action planning

- The extent to which action planning is a two-stage process using both the expertise of guidance staff at the threshold and subject specialist staff needs to be explored and clarified.

- As a result of contact with adult guidance services, individuals may decide to work towards production of an individual action plan. This can be a lengthy process and may require an individual to return for several interviews before reaching the planning stage.

High profile guidance facilities in a large college

Croydon College has established a unified Customer Services Unit (CSU) on the ground floor of its site in central Croydon. Receptionists are situated in the centre of the carpeted entrance concourse. Close by them is the Information Centre, providing a front-line response to all initial enquiries. The Information Centre contains leaflets on college (and other) provision, an NCVQ database, and is furnished with easy chairs for comfortable browsing. It is staffed by a team led by an administrative officer at Principal Officer grade. The staff can refer enquiries either direct to appropriate staff in the faculties or, if more detailed guidance and counselling are needed, to one of the services based in the CSU along the corridor. The CSU is a large, carpeted open-plan area with easy access. It brings together in one location:

- Croydon Adult Learning Advice Centre
- Adult Education Information Service
- Careers Advisory Service
- South London Training Information Base
- Training Access Points Scheme (TAPS)
- The Open College Gateway Centre

as well as the College Learning Support Co-ordinator and the Access and Progression Co-ordinator.

The CSU is managed by the Customer Focus Development Manager. The CSU, as well as providing a 'one stop information (and advice) shop' for clients, is also able to provide marketing information (and a sharp stimulus to curriculum development), on the basis of the enquiries received.

High profile guidance facilities in a medium-size college

Hartlepool College has recently set up a Student Services Unit with four full-time members of staff plus secretarial and clerical assistance. One of its functions is to provide information and initial advice and guidance. The Unit is accommodated in an open-plan area, attractively decorated and furnished, with open access from the main reception area of the College. Hence it has a visibly high profile and is perceived to be easily accessed by enquirers new to the College.

Adult access to guidance services

Avon LEA is working towards clear integration of the Careers Service with providers of adult guidance in the FE service.

Advice points in a multi-site college

Wakefield College is currently making central information and advice points available on all its sites. Essentially, this entails providing an information desk close to reception - and therefore in an obvious location - but not part of reception. Each point is operated by support staff personnel able to answer queries on college provision. A database of all provision is being compiled and will be available at each desk.

Statement of entitlement at enrolment

In its policy document on admissions, Hartlepool College emphasises the need to meet the following criteria:

- that students are given appropriate guidance and advice upon their choice of course;
- that prior learning and experience are given due consideration;
- that barriers to enrolment are tackled;
- that comprehensive records of applications, enrolments and induction are kept;
- that the College's equal opportunities policy is enforced;
- that appropriate support is made available.

Access facilities centrally located

At East Warwickshire College a tradition of catering for the needs of a high proportion of part-time students is reflected in the development of a range of provision for Flexible Access concentrated in a suite of rooms. The Rugby Educational Workshop, primarily a return-to-learn facility, is housed adjacent to the main library in an open-plan arrangement as a complementary APL/A resource facility. The Rugby Educational Workshop also provides a study base for a whole range of flexibly delivered programmes. An adjacent suite of rooms houses Careers Guidance and Counselling, and the College's APL/A project. Buoyant demand for these services is beginning to generate a need for more space.

Comprehensive initial services

At Lowestoft College, threshold services include advice and information services, pre-entry counselling and diagnosis, provision of 'top-up' programmes prior to entering an individual's main programme, individualised timetable preparation/negotiation, accreditation of prior achievement, supported distance learning and central all year-round admissions services. These services, with suitable counselling rooms and accommodation for the staff to support them, are all grouped around the main college entrance with a large, attractively designed and decorated reception with adjacent information point. On-going counselling/careers advice, Reccords of Achievement preparation and the library/learning resources centre are also adjacent to this welcoming college 'threshold'.

Comprehensive guidance service

In South Hertfordshire, an adult guidance service has recently been established at an annexe of the College. This service comprises an information base covering:

- education and training opportunities, both locally and further afield;
- careers and employment;
- self-assessment - a wide range of books, questionnaires, videos and interactive computer programs are available;
- information on sources of financial support for learning and training.

A county-wide service

In Hertfordshire, a Central Information Service is currently being established to

collate and distribute information required by those offering an adult guidance service. This will provide a major resource for the development of a county-wide service. The Hertfordshire TEC has agreed to fund this information service, which will overcome present duplication of effort and improve efficiency, allowing more time for guidance and counselling with adults.

Evidence of demand

At Croydon College Information Centre, 5000 enquiries were received in the first five months. At the South Hertfordshire Adult Guidance Service, there is currently a four-week backlog of people waiting for an appointment.

BARRIERS TO ACCESS AT THE THRESHOLD - Key factors and issues

- Sources of information and advice provided within a college may not be accessible to many potential client groups because of the location of the college.

- Some individuals have poor perceptions of their own learning ability and it may be necessary for a college to build up their confidence before they feel able to cross the college threshold.

- Certain client groups may feel inhibited by their perception of educational institutions as threatening, a perception which may be exacerbated by the architectural design of some colleges - particularly those with imposing portals. This negative image may remain even where colleges have dramatically changed the ethos which engendered such reservations.

- Some people from ethnic minorities - particularly first and second generation - may feel unable to cross a college threshold because of language and culture barriers.

- There is often a lack of clear information and advice on the availability of financial support for individuals undertaking a substantial learning programme.

- There may be financial difficulties for some adults in meeting fees for learning and accreditation when they are not registered unemployed and are not entitled to a mandatory or discretionary award. Agencies (e.g. TECs) need to consider financial support and incentives for 'life-long' learning.

- Wide variations in the fees for registration and assessment charged by examining and validating bodies make some qualifications more expensive to obtain than others. This may inhibit a potential learner from embarking on a learning programme leading to an appropriate qualification.

- The perceptions of employers and employees concerning the need for and value of work-related further education may not coincide. Hence, employees in this situation may be barred from further development.

- Many employers have a conventional view of training and its related further education and they expect all their employees on part-time day release to undergo the same programme. They are not inclined to allow the differential progress that can result from individual programmes based on assessment of prior learning.

- Women with young families below school age may be inhibited from re-entering education, training, re-training and work unless they have access to childcare .

- Parents with young families of school age need to be able to attend college at times which do not conflict with their family responsibilities.

- Many individuals from different client groups within the community are prevented from gaining access to learning and qualifications because the learning support necessary to enable them to realise this potential, is not available.

- Present funding models do not usually provide financial incentives to develop provision which will maximise access opportunities for such groups.

- The curriculum in many colleges is not always easy for potential clients to understand. It may be difficult to ascertain what a particular course or qualification consists of. They are, therefore, unable to establish whether the provision is appropriate for them, and whether their existing skills and knowledge are relevant.

BARRIERS TO ACCESS AT THE THRESHOLD - Examples

Enhancing accessibility of information and advice

Hall Green College provides a High Street 'shop' in which it can assist prospective learners to cross the college threshold or service their learning needs completely. Pre-entry diagnostic counselling is well developed. The welcoming environment and the easily-crossed threshold are features of this 'shop'. Very tentative enquirers - such as Muslim women - can look in through the shop window and see their peers, and others, busily using computers and other learning resources.

Building confidence

Hartlepool College provides advisory and initial learning services in six community centres where the environment appears to local people to be less 'threatening'. The aim is to build confidence and gradually attract learners across the college threshold.

Encouraging ethnic minorities

Rotherham College has recently appointed a member of staff whose responsibility is to assist in attracting people from minority groups into the college. In addition to monitoring the situation in general, his functions include translating college leaflets, visiting mosques and community centres, and assisting learners in the College Open Learning Workshop.

Financial Assistance

The Hertfordshire TEC has agreed to provide bursaries for single parents who are ineligible for Employment Training (ET) or fee concessions but who wish to obtain new qualifications to help them get a better job. These bursaries are being piloted in the Watford area.

Access for women

Newcastle College Academic Board has been considering the recommendations of a working party set up to review issues related to access for women. Amongst a substantial number of recommendations, those that are specific to threshold services include: targeting information at appropriate locations in the city; specific marketing to attract women to subjects and qualifications that traditionally have been exclusively male orientated; providing a welcoming approach to enquirers in a location within the College that is easily accessible; ensuring provision of appropriate initial counselling; providing a sympathetic approach to the need to look after dependents.

Outreach centres

At a time when many colleges are reducing the number of sites, East Birmingham College has increased its number of outreach centres by developing links with local schools to increase adult education opportunities. In addition to providing a taste of further education to encourage wider adult participation, the College, through its work with Muslim adults, has won a level of respect in the Community which has led to greater willingness to encourage Muslim girls wishing to progress to further education.

Child care

Hartlepool College has a purpose-built crèche on the College campus, the initial capital costs for which were provided jointly by the Task Force, Cleveland LEA and the College - the College contribution being in kind; ET and YT students helped to fit out the shell of the building. The crèche operates under playgroup regulations and therefore does not provide for babies or very young toddlers. There are 20 places and currently 140 clients, preference being given to students on the 'New Start' programme for adult returners. Three qualified full-time staff are assisted by one volunteer and two YT trainees. The crèche is fully operational over most of the year and is therefore able to assist parents attending 40-week courses. Nevertheless, these parents may also have school-age children whose holidays cut across the 40-week period. The College is therefore trying to work out a play-scheme for these children in co-operation with the Borough Council. The running costs of the crèche are a major problem, particularly in the current financial circumstances. However, the College is sufficiently convinced of the value of the crèche to seek ways and means of ensuring its continued provision.

The Flexible Learning Development project at Milton Keynes included in its recommendations a strategy for developing child care facilities at the College.

At Croydon College's Information Centre, staff are intending to provide a 'children's corner', so that children can play while their parents obtain the information and advice they require.

Timetables

At Calderdale College, instructions are given that provision intended for client groups with travel and/or childcare commitments must be timetabled between 09.45 and 14.45 hours.

Links with the library service

Access to flexible learning resource materials is available via public libraries in some areas through an Employment Department/Libraries Association pilot project involving ten libraries and additional action by some library authorities. These facilities (with links to colleges for tutor support where requested) have provided new 'return-to-learn' opportunities for individuals, not participating in college provision at present; many of whom have subsequently enrolled for further study.

Professional courses delivered entirely by flexible approaches

East Warwickshire College now offers all provision of professional courses in Business/Managerial disciplines by flexible delivery using a mix of home study, workplace study and use of College facilities appropriate to students' requirements. Demand has increased significantly and nearly 400 students will benefit from this provision in the current year.

CURRICULUM ORGANISATION - Key factors and issues

- In most colleges, provision is still organised around the needs of identified groups of students who are assumed to share common needs and common goals. This narrows access and choice for individuals.

- Assumptions about the primary purpose and target client groups for FE colleges (e.g. provision for 16-19-year-old full-time students; part-time day release groups) prevent colleges addressing the need to develop flexible access to the curriculum for all.

- The concept of 'infill' by adults into vacancies in existing provision designed around the needs of 16-19s, or other specific target groups, may be a pragmatic solution in terms of resources, but may also be a substitute for real progress towards the development of genuinely flexible access to the curriculum.

- Some colleges are developing portfolios of alternative modes of access to the curriculum to fit the needs of different client groups and individuals, e.g. full-time programmes alongside continuous access to core skills (via workshops), NVQs and other units available through resource-based learning.

- Modularisation/unitisation of the curriculum is generally recognised as a prerequisite for flexible access, but few colleges, if any, have succeeded in modularising/unitising more than a small part of their provision.

- Prerequisites for flexible access to learning and accreditation are emerging as:

  - a set of standards (competences or learning outcomes) to use as the basis for initial assessment, APL/A, credit transfer;

  - a curriculum described in terms of outcomes or learning objectives, grouped into modules or units to enable roll-on, roll-off enrolment, and accumulation of unit credits;

  - a unified curriculum (academic and vocational) based on units/modules so as not to restrict pathways to one route or the other.

These prerequisites are not, as yet, generally available within the existing qualifications system. However, it is clear that staff in colleges can provide some of the benefits by means of curriculum development and modes of delivery.

- In areas of the curriculum where NVQs are available, unitisation/modularisation is generally well advanced, and alternative modes of delivery are being developed.

- Staff in many colleges do not feel it is worthwhile to attempt modularisation/ unitisation of the curriculum until such work is undertaken by the relevant Lead Body or EVB. The apparently slow progress of such work and the continuing incompatibility of qualifications systems (e.g. 'A' Levels and NVQs) undermines motivation.

- In some colleges, the purpose of workshops is perceived to be the provision of back-up (remedial) support, or as the setting for open learning, rather than as a means of access to 'mainstream' curriculum, effective learning, and assessment.

- Some colleges have employed curriculum audits to find out how far the curriculum is amenable to flexible access, and to obtain the information needed for use in threshold services (e.g. to feed into databases for use in initial guidance, and to facilitate enrolment for top-up training). Such curriculum audits can act as powerful catalysts for curriculum development.

- NVQs require learning and assessment to take place in realistic work situations. Except in areas of the curriculum in which NVQs are available, some colleges still perceive the classroom as being the principal arena in which learning can take place. The opportunities for work-based learning and the curriculum development necessary to utilise them, have not generally been explored or addressed.

- In some colleges, modularisation/ unitisation based on 'inputs' provides a sound organised framework of blocks of time, but retains the rigidity of fixed attendance times. Modularisation/ unitisation based on 'outcomes,' however, provides more flexibility in modes of delivery and the possibility of direct access to assessment.

- Modularisation of the curriculum leads not only to flexible access but can also increase the options open to both full- and part-time students.

- Although greater flexibility of access is likely to be achieved by modularisation/ unitisation of the curriculum, the enthusiasm of some staff is muted since they see modularisation as leading to lack of coherence in learning.

- Curriculum change that would lead to greater flexibility is often inhibited by the regulations of external examining bodies and by what are perceived to be their slow approval procedures for new provision.

- Individual learning programmes are more easily catered for when a college timetable is designed in standard time blocks.

- Curriculum audits often highlight opportunities to offer modules/units common to different courses/learning programmes. Benefits arise in terms of efficiency of delivery, and flexibility through repetition of modules at different points in the academic year. However, this raises issues related to the contextual relevance of modules delivered to students with perhaps significantly different learning programmes.

- Trends towards increasing adult participation and work-based learning increase

the heterogeneity of learning requirements among college client groups. This clearly exerts a pressure for curriculum change leading to greater flexibility.

- In colleges where a number of vocational areas have been modularised - particularly in an NVQ context - opportunities for learning and assessment in 'realistic work situations' will be increased by means of access to other areas of the curriculum.

CURRICULUM ORGANISATION - Examples

Modularising an area of the curriculum

Greenhill College has started by modularising the secretarial curriculum since many different secretarial courses and qualifications shared the same elements and there was pressure on staff and room availability. Although these modules more or less coincide with NVQ units, they are timetabled in four-week blocks rather than based purely on outcomes.

Group tutors negotiate 'routes' with their full-time students every four weeks, and book them into modules at operation headquarters in the Guidance Unit. (Full-time students are grouped in tutor groups on the basis of their 'core' programmes, e.g. ET, Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education ((CPVE)), English as a Second Language ((ESL)) Foundation.) Infill is available to 'stand-alone adults' - i.e. part-time adults, who negotiate their entry onto modules with staff in the Guidance Unit.

The system is seen as an embryo for modularisation across the whole college provision. There are regular assessment/ recording/reporting points for all their full-time students during the year, and they are trying to synchronise this system with the modular system. Guidance is seen as central to any modular system, and tutors are responsible for ensuring that students follow coherent routes, balanced against total freedom of choice.

Curriculum audit of core skills

Calderdale College is currently undertaking a curriculum audit aimed at analysing the extent to which core skills are covered in present provision. In parallel with this exercise, the College has initiated development of generic core skill modules. These modules may permeate a current course or they may be presented as discrete provision.

APL/A highlights need for flexible delivery

Some colleges report that the 'top-up' requirements diagnosed for APL/A clients are often difficult to accommodate. There have also been occasions where exemptions from part of a course have reduced numbers in significant segments of a course to an unacceptable level.

Rationalising provision through multi-pathways

At Milton Keynes College a workshop has been established that will provide

continuous access to all modules and assignments concerned with Human Resource Development as a component of any course. This facility was developed with resources related to the Human Resources element of BTEC Business Studies courses.

In its current Strategic Development Plan, Calderdale College has set itself a target of linking BTEC National Diplomas in Business and Finance, and in Performing Arts, with appropriate A level provision.

Staff in the Catering Faculty at Croydon College have expressed all their programmes in competences that are common to a variety of certificated programmes. Learners (both full- and part-time) undertaking similar practical activities may therefore be working towards (and assessed for) a variety of different qualifications. They are able to attend in blocks of time (minimum of three hours) at times to suit themselves, day or evening. Staff have produced supporting learning materials, laminated for use in practical sessions, and reproduced as small booklets (40p each) for study at home or in a small resource/study area provided.

The Kidderminster College Modular Curriculum Development Project in Mathematics and Science has recognised the commonality between different syllabuses in mathematics and science. Rationalisation is achieved by re-organising the curriculum in modular fashion. Different pathways can be provided, for example:

- assembling general science qualification modules from module banks of the three physical sciences;
- using the great overlap between Examining Boards' syllabuses to allow more student choice;
- identification of overlap between BTEC and GCSE, A/S and A level courses.

The rationalisation achieved also reduces somewhat the scale of the task of providing learning resources to support flexible delivery.

Modularisation creates growth

At Greenhill College, the demand for full-time training in hairdressing was falling but now that NVQs are available, the volume of part-time and work-based clients has made this a growth area.
At Milton Keynes College, the demand for traditional engineering courses fell due to the loss of British Rail trainees. Modularisation of the curriculum and the development of workshops will mean that PICKUP-style work can now expand to compensate.

A definition of coherence

Wirral Metropolitan College believes that coherence is a matter for the student to determine and not the lecturer or institution. Coherence emerges through the relationship formed between the student and the various services provided, rather than in the mind of the provider. Coherence can occur when the institution responds to individual need and circumstances within a progressive system of credits. It is not necessarily the same as curriculum continuity.

Roll-on roll-off through infill

In order to 'build up' capacity for infill, the standard size of a group in the Catering Faculty at Croydon College has been reduced from 16 learners to 12. This is on the understanding that lecturers will accept additional students on a flexible roll-on roll-

off basis. This arrangement avoids the problem of 'no vacancies for infill' and is currently operating smoothly.

Roll-on/roll-off though workshop provision

South Trafford College has designed and developed a flexible learning workshop for typing and word-processing in which all learners work on individual programmes. This provision is marketed through a number of initiatives, including a leaflet giving the following information:

When Does It Take Place?
Every morning, afternoon and three evenings a week. You can book one or more sessions on a regular basis to suit your convenience and needs.

How Is It Done?
Everyone works to his or her own individual programme. Your tutor will assess your needs and supervise your programme throughout. All stages are in the same room at the same time and there is always a tutor in attendance to give help when required.

Course Length
Varies according to the needs of the individual. You can enroll at any time of the year for any number of sessions for any number of weeks.

Examinations
Royal Society of Arts (RSA) examinations are offered five times a year at all stages for people wishing to gain formal qualifications.

What Will It Cost?
All students pay a small registration fee plus a variable tuition fee based on the number of sessions and weeks booked.

The same provision, under the same conditions, is also provided in a Community Centre some seven miles from the College.

Roll-on roll-off enrolment in a salon

The provision for Hairdressing NVQ level 2 at Croydon College has dispensed with set learner timetables and patterns of attendance. They no longer have discrete first- and second-year groups and do not differentiate between full- and part-time students. Groups working in a salon are composed of learners with a variety of attendance modes. They are able to choose the days and times that suit them from the menu of options on offer, and then pay a fee based on the number of hours in the salon required.

Work experience in college

At Croydon College, NVQ level 3 Business and Administration students obtain experience and assessment of supervision skills by supervising Hairdressing trainees in reception duties in the salon and, similarly by supervising Catering students in the training restaurant.

Timetabling

At Calderdale College, all timetabling blocks must be one and a half hours long. The block 9 a.m. to 10.30 a.m. is the only one available in split form of two blocks of three quarters of an hour.

Modularisation and credit accumulation

In response to ET and the requirement for a roll on/roll off facility, Hartlepool College has developed SMARTT (Special Modular Accreditation Route Through Training). This is accredited through the Northern Council for Further Education (NCFE). The extensive staff development programme required for this curriculum exercise has made the teaching staff aware of the potential of modularisation. Hence, the College is now developing modularisation in discrete areas of mainstream provision, mainly driven by NVQs. However, the College reports it is proceeding cautiously because the national situation appears still to be in flux.

A curriculum audit carried out in 1987-88 by the Department of Social and Community Education at Rotherham College identified overlapping content in a number of discrete Health and Social Care Courses, completion of which offered learners little opportunity for credit accumulation and transfer, or progression. Using the content of these courses, departmental staff developed programmes of inter-linked modules assigned to NVQ levels and piloted them. The new programmes allowed for a major move towards learner-centred provision in which an appropriate balance was sought between group-based learning, resource-based learning for individuals, and work-based learning. Careful monitoring and evaluation of the initiative led to its further implementation, with particular emphasis on induction processes, in the following year.

Individualised timetables symbolise client-centred provision

At Lowestoft College the curriculum is being organised into six-week modules (except for Art and Design where they are of 12 weeks). This permits the formulation of individualised student timetables which can be reviewed at six-week intervals. Each module has six annual start dates allowing genuine year-round enrolment.

MANAGING AND SUPPORTING LEARNING - Key factors and issues

- Flexible student-centred learning requires that guidance, counselling, and one-to-one tutorial support are central to the whole learning and assessment experience, providing definition, direction, coherence and cohesion to individual learning programmes.

- Teachers are experienced in working with groups of students rather than individuals. They may need assistance in developing confidence, appropriate approaches and skills (e.g. in giving constructive feedback, in eliciting self-assessment) for one-to-one work with adult learners.

- The issue of how to respond to staff who are unwilling or unable to change their teaching style can too easily be postponed while change is in a formative stage.

- Flexible learning makes use of resource-based learning, but it should not be seen to rely entirely on it. Learners respond best to an appropriate mix of styles. In particular, there will always be a need for group activity to provide peer interaction - this need varying in intensity according to the subject being learned, and the needs of the individual.

- In resource-based learning there is often an overdependence on learning materials and a consequent lack of support for learners. Tutors are too often passive. Since they have been freed from the task of passing on information, they should be actively seeking opportunities to engage with learners in a supportive role.

- Colleges that have been involved in the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) tend to have better developed guidance systems and many already use Records of Achievement.

- The use of flexible learning requires an effective induction programme. Since admission to a college may take place at any time in the year, colleges will have to take steps to ensure that induction is always available.

- Individual learners may come with very traditional expectations of colleges, teachers and learning styles.

- In the past, most new students had not previously experienced flexible learning and were often more familiar with passive learning styles.

- Students are now beginning to arrive - and will continue to arrive in greater numbers - from schools influenced by TVEI. They will expect to work at their own pace in a variety of learning styles.

- Relying on voluntary attendance at flexible times in learning workshops as the sole means of learning is unlikely to provide sufficient structure for some 16-19 year olds. It is therefore likely to be necessary to insist on a core of attendance times, and to provide group tutorials and review sessions at set intervals.

- Non-teaching staff are beginning to take on roles which increase their direct contact with learners, e.g. information provision, learning workshop administration, provision of learning resources, etc. This coincides with changes in the role of teaching staff and is a potential source of both tension and enrichment.

- Most staff refer to a mix of learning styles as being the most successful approach. However assembly of an optimal mix is based on the intuitive judgement of staff who have often had little relevant training.

- Flexible learning is still too frequently perceived as an alternative and separate form of provision.

MANAGING AND SUPPORTING LEARNING - Examples

Training Credit Pilot

In Croydon, the SOLOTEC Training Credit Pilot Scheme will seek to ensure that all school-leavers have an individual action plan before they leave school. On receipt of

a completed Training Plan, SOLOTEC will issue a training credit - in the form of a 'smart card' - to the value of the training required for the achievement of a qualification. The 'smart card' will provide the means of logging in attendance at the College as well as recording achievement. Hence the card will be wiped as each unit is achieved and also every six weeks as part of the trainee review.

Linking action plans with records of achievement

Hertfordshire LEA has developed a Standard Action Plan in readiness for their TEC pilot. The intention is to extend the use of the Action Plan as an underpinning element of the guidance and review process. The Action Plan will be used in conjunction with a Record of Achievement and as a framework for individual learning plans.

Use of technology in recording progress

On entry to Wirral Metropolitan College, students purchase a 'Learning Pass' (£3.00 or £1.40 - UB40). This is a formatted disk which gives them access to the learning network and is used to record their achievements. Student records are entered into the main memory at regular review intervals, and students are given a print-out of their achievements at each review point. This can be stored in a National Record of Vocational Achievement (NROVA) or Student Record. Students are also given a swipe card for entry to learning workshops and to record their use of such facilities.

Induction through flexible learning materials

The Business Sector of the College of North East London has developed induction in the form of flexible learning material that is delivered through a tutor-supported workshop. The model provides that students will be able to join at any stage of the year and after induction proceed to the next appropriate module in their programme.

There are two aims for induction:

- provide information about the college, programme of study and modules;
- assess skills and knowledge needed to participate in the programme.

The pack consists of six different activities or assignments. It is flexible and learners can do the various activities at their own pace. However, they may need a number of hours to complete the induction process. This can be done full time, or the equivalent of a day a week, say during one six-week modular block.

A review cycle

As part of its modularisation project, the College of North East London has instituted a six-weekly cycle of review. This review provides a focus for each individual within the programme, gives support and feedback in learning, and monitors the overall coherence of the modular provision.

LEA policy on Record of Achievement facilitates core skills entitlement

The standardised Suffolk Record of Achievement with provisional accreditation via the Oxford and Cambridge Board, has facilitated collaboration between schools and colleges in provision of core skills entitlement and been well-received by local employers.

Expert system assists self-managed learning

At Hall Green College the use of an expert system to guide students through appropriate learning resources in Management and Construction Management has significantly increased student autonomy.

TOOLS FOR FLEXIBLE LEARNING - Key factors and issues

Learning materials

- There is a paucity of commercially published, good quality learning materials in a range of vocational subjects. Where materials are available, they are often expensive and their purchase in any significant bulk requires substantial investment.

- In-house development and adaptation of learning materials require tutors to be able to prepare learning packages. This involves them in many of the skills they already use in traditional teaching: setting objectives, selecting and sequencing material, choosing interesting presentation and devising appropriate feedback and assessment. However, the actual writing and development of a package is a different task from the preparation of a lesson, and the best class teachers are not necessarily the best preparers of learning materials. Problems with learning design, ambiguity, lay-out and language can seriously limit their effectiveness and value in structuring learning.

- In order to maintain quality in the learning experience, it is important that learning materials promote active learning. Material writers should pay careful attention to the accessibility of the language used, and create materials which encourage learners to access a range of information sources - including real-life sources.

- Copyright is a very important element in the preparation of learning materials. First, it must be clear who holds the copyright of any learning package produced in a college. Secondly, permission should be sought for the use of material from other sources, for which a license payment may be required.

- Where there is a substantial amount of in-house materials development taking place, this entails a significant cost in staff time - more than is frequently realised - and also makes considerable demands on reprographic resources.

- Underestimating the scale of the task of creating good quality learning materials can result in cutting corners on quality or lead to copyright problems. Often, materials are created which can be used successfully in their 'home' college but which lack the quality required for wider dissemination.

- Where materials development is seen as an additional task for staff, colleges need to consider both how they pay staff for this service and also how they can recoup the cost, bearing in mind a potentially short shelf-life.

- College libraries can play a key role in providing access to a range of appropriate learning materials and resources.

Learning technology

- Developments in the use of information technology (IT) appear to be confined, in the main, to Business Studies, Secretarial and Management areas of the curriculum. There is a perceived neglect of IT in other areas.

- There is limited progress in the use of computer- assisted learning (CAL) in colleges. Hardware and good quality software/courseware are highly priced and colleges have difficulty in expanding their learning technology facilities at a time of stand-still and sometimes reducing budgets.

- In-house development of software/ courseware bears a heavy cost in terms of staff time, and requires skills that are possessed by only a few staff.

- New multimedia technologies have the potential to deliver learning programmes at costs which would be feasible for some educational purposes. However, hardware and software producers tend to concentrate greater effort on more lucrative markets in industry.

- Potential innovative use of IT in APL/A and the extent to which it can reduce costs has yet to be realised in most colleges.

Learning workshops

- Ideally, learning workshops are best designed on an open-plan basis, with integral access to small tutorial rooms and storage space. This is likely to entail structural alterations which may be inhibited by the design of the college building or by lack of funding.

- Decisions have to be made with regard to the character of learning workshops, whether they are to be single subject or multi-subject. Such decisions affect both the range of available materials to support diverse learning needs and the familiarity of tutorial staff with the full range of materials.

- Multi-site colleges must ensure that all their sites have appropriate learning workshop provision and this may lead to difficult budget decisions.

- The activities of support staff (e.g. library and learning resource staff, technicians) engaged in the operation of learning workshops involves considerable role change. They play a 'front-of-house' role in reception and they have a greater degree of direct contact with learners, increasingly providing them with initial guidance and support.

- Large open-plan workshops have many merits but they may lack intimacy and result in learners perceiving a lack of support.

- Well-equipped workshops with good resources create a high quality learning environment but present the possibility of over-reliance on resources at the expense of support.

- College libraries and other resource centres should be open in the evening and at weekends if they are to support flexible access to learning. However, budget limitations are leading to the closure of such facilities at lunchtimes and even for sessions during the day in order to cut costs.

- The use of learning workshops is a popular means of delivering flexible learning in FE colleges. A well-equipped learning environment with high quality resources

may produce sub-optimal results if the learning management skills of staff have not been developed. Care is needed to avoid the following:

- students working in isolation relying too heavily on materials with insufficient staff attention and opportunities for group work (e.g. group tutorials);
- staff becoming passive, responding mostly to direct requests for help instead of actively facilitating learning and reviews of progress;
- some learning resources requiring greater literacy/numeracy skills than is essential to achieve competence in the task which they describe.

- If the number of learners in a workshop is too high (in proportion to the number of staff and equipment available), individuals may have to wait too long for attention. Thus, their progress will be slowed, and they are likely to become discouraged.

TOOLS FOR FLEXIBLE LEARNING - Examples

Support for materials development

At Norfolk College of Art and Technology, a full-time co-ordinator assists teachers in the writing of materials. These are then produced to a highly professional standard using a consistent house style by a specialist learning resource production team.

Enhancing a college reprographic system

Newcastle College has enhanced its reprographic system so that it can support an increased reliance upon assignments, learning packages and other course-based materials. The College has also provided desk-top publishing hardware and software and developed a 'house style' manual for authors of learning materials. This strategy is underpinned by a staff development project.

Payment for materials writing

At Acton College, Engineering staff were paid a one-off fee to write materials in their own time. The College has published and marketed the materials to other colleges offering the same course, in order to recoup the cost.

Flexibility through workshop provision

Norfolk College of Art and Technology has a series of large open-plan learning workshops furnished, decorated and equipped to an exceptionally high standard. The proximity of workshops to each other on the same floor, or adjacent floors of a central tower block, provides opportunities for interchange, e.g. for access to support, enrichment material or alternative computing facilities at times of pressure. The high level of flexibility offered by the College is particularly beneficial given its large dispersed rural catchment area.

Roles for library staff

At East Warwickshire the unusually high number of part-time students has provided a pressure for curriculum change. Management and Professional Courses are now offered on an entirely open/flexible learning basis using learning facilities adjacent to the main library. All resources are therefore within library security. Counselling and tutorial rooms are adjacent. 'Drop-in' students are assisted by a member of the library staff who can direct them toward appropriate support if their tutor is not present.

Active learning management

A number of colleges reported examples of tutors becoming too passive when supervising learning workshops. Learners were given attention when they sought it from the tutor, but the learning process was not actively facilitated or managed. Staff development on the use of a flexible learning guidance cycle, learning management, and tutoring skills was one solution.

Diagnostic period

A pay-as-you-learn system (e.g. 72p per hour for as many hours as a learner requires) enables a diagnostic period to be built into the programmes of all flexible learners. Instead of committing themselves to enrolling for a whole course, a learner can enroll for a week, initially, to give the teacher time to work with the learner to assess existing skills and clarify future requirements. At the Wirral Metropolitan College, a full-time programme generally consists of 23 taught/course hours but students total up to 35 hours attending college facilities - learning workshops, resource centres, etc.

Learning materials

Learning materials need to be developed and published to support the acquisition of specific qualifications, e.g. NVQs. The use of learning materials in structuring work-place learning and assessment needs to be better recognised and exploited.

ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION - Key factors and issues

- The possibilities for credit transfer and credit accumulation are currently limited by the lack of qualifications in which unit credits are available.

- The continuing incompatibility of academic and vocational qualification structures (e.g. 'A' levels and NVQs) is restricting advances towards greater flexibility and wider access. Whereas NVQs are based on outcomes and units, it seems likely that the use of modular syllabuses in 'A' levels will be counter-balanced by insistence on a terminal exam and a substantial element of external assessment.

- Although a unit-based qualification system is still not generally available, some colleges have started developing their own unit-based curriculum. In this way students can still obtain some of the benefits; for example, 'A' level students can obtain internal formative unit credits, so students who do not succeed in the exam at the end of two years' study will have a record of what they have achieved along the way.

- Too few employers are aware of the existence of NVQs, their function and potential value.

- The public generally have not heard of NVQs, and are unaware of the possibilities of APL/A and flexible access to assessment and accreditation.

- Assessment and accreditation have not, traditionally, been available independent of enrolment on a course. Current staffing and resourcing systems do not allow for such a service.

- The establishment of a competitive training market, the growing influence of TECs, and the requirements of some LBs and EVBs will mean that staff from FE colleges will not be eligible to undertake assessment for NVQs, particularly workplace assessment, unless they are trained and qualified for the purpose. Staff will need access to the emerging new qualifications for assessors and verifiers based on the TDLB national standards.

- Colleges need to exploit their own potential for providing learning and assessment in realistic working situations; e.g. 'model' offices providing a real service to staff, other students or the public.

- Some college staff fear that NVQs represent a narrow interpretation of competence, which conflicts with their own educational values; for example, with the concept of integrated learning enshrined by BTEC courses and others, and the importance of core skills.

- Some staff in FE are sceptical concerning the impact of NVQs because they have been slow in coming 'on stream' in many vocational areas and the granting of conditional status from NCVQ meant that some EVBs did not adjust their requirements to meet NCVQ criteria. As a result, work which could have been undertaken by colleges (e.g. developing work-based assessment; undertaking whole college planning to implement flexible access to learning and qualifications) has not been seriously addressed.

- Some colleges are hesitant about marketing APL/A because they are already above target FTEs and therefore do not have the staff to undertake the work, or the capacity to meet the demand for top-up training.

- APL/A tends to create a demand for top-up training. Some colleges are running into difficulties because they have launched an APL/A service but are unable to provide flexible access to top-up training.

- There is some confusion over the distinction between assessment for the accreditation of prior learning and direct assessment of existing competence. There is emerging agreement that, where possible, direct assessment of existing competence is less time consuming (and therefore cheaper) than preparation of a portfolio of evidence of previous achievement.

- Should teachers incorporate APL/A into their workloads (e.g. by means of assigned hours with target case loads) or should they be paid a flat rate in addition to their salaries, out of the income generated by charging the client at full cost?

- Some colleges are exploring the provision of APL/A to companies as a means of generating income. However, APL/A as a marketing tool (i.e. the recruitment of clients for top-up training) within companies is less popular with some colleges because they are unable to respond to the volume of demand generated.

- NVQs require assessment of performance in real or realistic work situations, which colleges may sometimes find difficult to provide.

- Many qualifications still require tests or examinations to be taken at fixed dates and times. There is still a long 'lead-in' time between registering for assessment and the date of assessment. Moreover, some EVBs refuse to accept simultaneous registration and application for assessment.

- Some vocational qualifications still include information testing by written exams at fixed times of the year. This makes assessment on demand impossible.

- Some qualifications, despite having NVQ status, still rely on written testing of knowledge. Candidates are required to prove what they know in a written format in response to written questions. The use of inaccessible language in mandatory questions - both oral and written - may discriminate against ESL students as well as those with learning difficulties.

- There is an issue as to who carries out APL/A procedures. A number of models appear to be developing:

  - embedded within curriculum areas and delivered by specialist staff;
  - initial portfolio preparation provided by general APL/A centres and completion of the portfolio under the guidance of specialist staff;
  - portfolio preparation provided by general APL/A centres, with referral to specialist staff for assessment only.

- Validating bodies are cautious about APL/A. While they make supportive noises, their requirements may make APL/A difficult or impractical for qualifications where it is theoretically available.

- The type and quality of acceptable evidence may vary between verifiers, and validating bodies must take steps to ensure consistency.

- 'Generalist' assessors can potentially process larger numbers of candidates and more fully develop the interpersonal skills required. However, they cannot have sufficient breadth and depth of subject knowledge to cover the range of candidates presenting themselves for assessment.

- Candidates for APL/A needing little or no 'top up' may find what they receive from the college less tangible than participation in a 'course'.

- Colleges are experiencing difficulty in developing a charging policy for APL/A. Wide variations in price may confuse clients.

- There are currently various approaches to charging for APL/A. Some colleges provide a free initial interview or briefing session (as a loss leader), and only charge a fee when the candidate commits him or herself to preparation for assessment. Some colleges charge a staged series of fees, e.g. for initial interview; for assistance with portfolio preparation (hourly fee per visit); for assessment (different fees for portfolio and direct assessment). Some colleges charge a flat hourly rate for all aspects of the service. Some colleges charge the same fee as for enrolment on 'the course'.

- Because APL/A is a new service there is currently some uncertainty over who should pay for it, e.g. the client, the LEA, the TEC, the employer, or the college as a form of marketing 'loss-leader'.

- The costs of APL/A to a candidate can mount up considerably. One-to-one assessment, particularly when economically costed, may seem poor value for money when compared with a subsidised course fee.

- The use by individuals of expert systems (e.g. for initial identification of achievements relevant to their skills and aspirations), could reduce costs and increase autonomy and access.

- Some candidates may find computer- or text-based aids to portfolio compilation, impersonal or difficult to use. Others prefer the autonomy an expert system can bring.

- In-company APL/A by college staff may be cheaper to provide than working with individuals who come to college because of the advantages of 'batch processing'. Colleges can negotiate a composite fee with individual companies.

- Reduced costs may also be achieved if some of the APL/A process is conducted in a group situation through briefing workshops and portfolio preparation workshops.

ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION - Examples

Workshops on portfolio development

At Milton Keynes College, APL/A will be piloted in a new learning centre. APL/A advisers will assist candidates to identify the evidence they will need and the means of obtaining it, using checklists of performance criteria supplied by vocational specialists. At regular intervals, workshops on portfolio development will be provided for groups of candidates to assist their confidence and to reduce costs. Portfolios of evidence will be assessed by vocational specialists from the relevant curriculum areas.

APL/A using open learning packages

At Rotherham College, introductory APL/A modules are provided through the Where am I now? open learning packages written and developed by the College. They are available in the College Open Workshop. Hence APL/A is - at an initial stage - linked to core skills and can provide for certification through the South Yorkshire Open College Federation. This can lead either to further learning in the Open Workshop or to referral to vocational departments for specialised APL/A.

APL/A seen as normal provision

The provision of APL/A at Blackpool College is regarded as a normal provision of the College departments. As part of the planning process, each Head of Department provides a Departmental Strategic Plan - which must include details of the processes and procedures to be used for APL (or Certification of Prior Learning Achievement as Blackpool prefer to call it).

Expert systems in APL/A

An expert system for APL/A is currently being developed at Cross Keys College in

relation to a limited number of competence-based City and Guilds of London Institute (C&G) engineering qualifications. Individuals are assisted to explore their experience and identify existing competence. This is then matched to the competence required for the qualification. The expert system therefore assists students with portfolio preparation and reduces the total staff time required.

LEA strategy for assessment on demand

Croydon LEA's strategy is to move progressively towards availability of 'assessment on demand' so that clients may receive credit for achievements before committing themselves to a course or programme. A network of assessment centres will be established, drawing on work already underway within the Continuing Education and Training Service, and Croydon College. Such centres will be provided and resourced as a client service forming part of current provision; they will not be added extras or require an overall increase in resources. It is planned to draw on the expertise of the Careers Service, and to involve other providers as appropriate.

Staff timetabled for work place assessment

At Milton Keynes College, modules leading to NVQ level 3 in secretarial studies are offered on one evening per week in the college supported by a lecturer who has an additional three hours per week for workplace assessment.

Variations in the price of APL/A

Staff from different faculties in the same college charged:

- a company £500 per candidate
- an individual £20 for the initial interview, plus £15 per unit assessed. (In order to assess the units, the member of staff had to visit the workplace on three occasions, for three hours each visit.)

In the Peterborough and N. Lincs APL/A service, fees are incurred by candidates only when they decide to go ahead with seeking accreditation. Candidates are charged:

- £35 for the advisory service and support in portfolio preparation
- £65 for assessment plus the awarding body's registration fee

Newport College is operating a fee structure whereby the fees charged for a particular qualification are the same whether the client receives it through study, APL/A or APL/A plus 'top up'. The system works well but some employers and learners expect 'a course' and need a little convincing if a qualification is received without one.

The role of the 'generalist counsellor' in APL/A

Experience in the Newport/Cross Keys/Filton College project suggests a role for generalist APL/A counsellors in providing information to individuals and employers about how the system works and what to expect. Candidates are then referred to the most appropriate subject specialist for detailed assessment.

Inter-college collaboration facilitates APL/A development.

Regular contact through joint staff development events, support and a sharing of experience has been a feature of the collaboration in APL/A development between Newport, Cross Keys and Filton Colleges. Each College has been able to focus on particular curriculum areas and all three Colleges have been able to benefit from a wider experience of APL/A than would have been possible working in isolation.

Effective publicity for new forms of provision

An Avon LEA project offering assessment of competence for NVQs in Retail Distribution and Engineering found personal contact the most effective method of gaining interest and support from employers. Local newspaper advertisements and a local radio advertisement used by Bath College were also effective. In Weston super-Mare, the opportunity to make use of a member of the non-teaching staff, with marketing experience, for personal contacts over a three-week period, resulted in further enquiries from a hundred employers.

OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT

STAFFING AND ACCOMMODATION - Key factors and issues

Staffing

- The new demands made upon support staff in various aspects of flexible provision require a new approach to staffing establishments, and new job descriptions. This is already leading to a shift in the balance between tutorial and support staff.

- Flexible deployment of teaching staff across a range of responsibilities, including tutorials, learning workshops, assessment on demand and other flexible provision, is inhibited by current conditions of service. Hence, the extension of accessibility implicit in the flexible curriculum requires a commitment to operational flexibility in local agreements.

- If teaching staff are to perform competently the new roles demanded of them by flexible learning, there is a need to preface its introduction with staff development programmes for which there should be an internal budget allocation.

- Where there is a substantial amount of in-house learning materials development, this entails a cost in staff time for which there should be an internal budget allocation.

Accommodation

- The new emphasis on guidance and counselling and other threshold services means that appropriate accommodation must be provided - usually by alteration and modification - to cater both for the one-to-one sessions that such services entail and for the related administrative and clerical work.

- The further development of learning workshops/centres into new vocational areas may require substantial accommodation alterations which may be inhibited both by the integral structure of the college building and by the cost.

- There is a need to retain traditional classroom accommodation to ensure that alternative modes of study can be catered for as appropriate. Striking the right balance of accommodation is difficult, particularly in a transitional period.

- The design of engineering and construction workshops, of science laboratories and of the practical rooms of other vocational areas will need to reflect their more flexible use.

- Distance between sites in multi-site colleges may militate against flexible use of resources.

- Large-scale flexible learning requires the transformation of college libraries into study centres providing a variety of learning resources. This is a major project in itself but it can unlock a substantial resource both in terms of space and of staff.

- Most flexible learning centres seek to create a pleasant learning environment with a different ambience from the traditional classroom. This can have cost implications for furnishings, equipment and decoration.

- While many colleges are trying to reduce the number of sites on which they operate, the location of their main campus may be a barrier to access. Some contact points or element of threshold provision may need to be maintained at locations closer to the heart of the community they serve.

STAFFING AND ACCOMMODATION - Examples

Staff deployment in full-time courses

Of the 21 hours timetabled for full-time courses in Craven College, only 18 are timetabled in groups. The other three hours are designated - and timetabled - as time to be spent in a flexible learning workshop. This not only makes more economical use of teaching staff; it also makes acquisition of communication skills, project skills and IT skills the responsibility of a centralised resource.

A new definition of class contact

In a recent position paper on its movement towards student-centred approaches to learning, Newcastle College emphasises its commitment to a flexible and creative attitude to the concept of class contact. To this end, the College wishes it to be understood that it recognises that there are acceptable models for learning other than the conventional model which requires all students on a course to be together in the same place at the same time and constant supervision by a teacher.

Further, it accepts that teachers in further education are to be regarded as managers of the learning situation rather than as deliverers of knowledge. From this follows an acceptance that the organisation and preparation of learning events is legitimate class

contact activity. This acceptance, in turn, avoids any unnecessary distinction between class contact and timetabled allowance for course meetings, materials preparation and similar activity. The re-assessment of the meaning of class contact will, in all likelihood, be a gradual process which results from a reaction to proposals presented by course teams as the most effective deployment of the resources available to them.

In support of this process the College, the City and the lecturers' professional association, NATFHE, have agreed a new definition of class contact and have related this definition to the concept of averaging of workload.

A flexible working year

Both Croydon LEA and Croydon College support the introduction of a 'year-round' education and training service with effect from April 1991. This will enable income-generating activities, in particular, to be carried out throughout the calendar year. To facilitate this, a flexible working year agreement has been concluded with NATFHE.

Creating new types of support staff

Newcastle College provides both central flexible learning centres and department-based centres. Within its main central learning centre the college has established the post of Curriculum Information Officer - on the Association of Polytechnic Teachers (APT) scales - who plays a significant part in running the centre. The current holder of this post is a graduate librarian.

Wirral Metropolitan College has created, in its staffing establishment, a number of 'para-professional' posts at Administrative, Professional, Technical and Clerical (APTC) grade 5 level, leading to a reduction of the unit cost of some services.

New roles for existing support staff

At Lowestoft College new roles are emerging for support staff. For example, there is the resource management role for a former audio-visual aids technician now operating from an enhanced resource centre in a new mezzanine area of the library.

Phased conversion

Newcastle College is carrying out conversions to its accommodation in order to provide the open-plan spaces suitable for flexible learning workshops (or centres as Newcastle prefers to call them). Because conversion is both complex and expensive, the College has committed itself to carrying out one such conversion per year.

Conversion of an old school hall

Milton Keynes College is converting an old school hall at its Bletchley site into a Learning Centre. The hall was surrounded by smaller rooms that will now be used for group work and seminars. The stage will become an assessment and computer centre. A reception area will be provided. The library is above the old hall, and will now be linked to the Learning Centre.

Improving the learning environment

East Birmingham College has made significant improvement to its learning environment over the last couple of years. Learning centres created from former classrooms by replacement of dividing walls with moveable partitions, offer a variety of permutations. Greater use of learning technologies and resources is much in evidence and there is an improved standard of decoration, furniture and carpeting throughout . For example, immediately adjacent to an engineering workshop is a fully carpeted learning centre complete with potted plants. The Business Development Unit is furnished and equipped to a standard no senior corporate executive could question.

ADMINISTRATION, FEE STRUCTURES AND MIS - Key factors and issues

- College administrative systems geared to annual enrolments need to be revised to allow enrolments at times of the year appropriate to individual learning programmes. New procedures required for this should be seen as normal rather than exceptional, and their operation will be facilitated by the early participation of administrative staff.

- Enrolment and administrative procedures designed to support taught courses will be unsuitable for the processing of candidates for APL/A, assessment on demand, use of learning workshops and pay-as-you-learn systems.

- Flexibility of provision should be reflected in flexibility of fee structures. This requires a procedure whereby fees charged for individual learning programmes are seen as proportionate to those charged for annual courses providing analogous study.

- The level of fees could create a barrier to access for some learners.

- There is an issue as to whether new services such as initial guidance and counselling are provided free to individuals or whether there should be a charge .If initial guidance is to be provided free, there is a debate as to whether it should be funded by the college as a part of its marketing strategy, by the LEA as a community service, or by the TEC as a gateway to training.

- There is currently much experimentation in the pricing of new services such as individual action planning and APL/A. If an all-in fee is charged for a service (e.g. based on a notional average of time taken) rather than an hourly rate, there may need to be a time limit set when an additional fee would become chargeable. However, a fixed fee based on the time taken or support needed by an 'average' learner may well penalise a 'fast track' individual. If no charge is made for initial guidance and counselling, and an individual decides not to go forward for assessment or learning, the time spent on that individual will represent a 'loss' in terms of staff time.

- Paper-based registration of the use of learning workshops/centres is seen by some colleges as inefficient. They believe a more efficient form of registration is through a computerised system in which learners use a swipe card on entering and leaving the workshop. A number of relevant software packages are available. Most of them provide not only registration but also storage of learner details, attendance frequency distributions, enrolment and drop-out data. Some also provide standard or individualised letters related to a number of procedures such as examination entries.

- Computerised management information systems (CMIS) have, in the main, been developed on the basis of groups of learners following one-year courses. Planners need to ensure they have a CMIS that can effectively log data related to the kind of provision that characterises a flexible learner-centred college.

ADMINISTRATION, FEE STRUCTURES AND MIS - Examples

Pay as you learn

Hartlepool College sells £5 and £10 cards obtainable from the College Office. Each £1 gives one-hour access to equipment in the Independent Learning Centre, and the card is clipped on entry to the Centre.

Fees based on learning hours

Instead of a non-negotiable and flat-rate yearly fee, Croydon College now has a flexible fee structure which is calculated on the number of learning hours a customer buys. For non-advanced programmes, the hourly rate for 1990-1 is set at 60p while the price for advanced programmes is 85p per hour.

A college management information system

The Calderdale College computerised MIS was set up in 1988. In its first year of operation it was a rudimentary system to help plan and monitor resource utilisation.
In 1989, Calderdale bought the Coventry Technical College system which collects and processes historical data about who did what, where, when and to whom, direct from class registers. Unlike many systems this requires only that and that students carry their enrolment cards. They have hugely expanded the interrogation ability of this core system using the 'Paradox' relational database. The impact on efficiency has been dramatic. The College was told it must save £402K in 1990-91. In fact it saved £750K, of which £400K can be shown to have been possible by using the MIS to identify inefficiencies, notably on staff utilisation. These savings have been made without a single redundancy or narrowing of provision.

MIS in Calderdale supports three changes in college management practice at all levels. Firstly, that management should use recent information, not about what was planned, but about what actually happened. Secondly, that they create a climate of open information. Thirdly, that responsibility be devolved as far as possible, developing forms of formula funding such as 'CRAS' for allocating consumable resources. Having such a computerised MIS has enabled managers to monitor and act on attendance patterns, room utilisation, drop-out rates, unenrolled students, exam results by ethnicity, part-time teacher's pay (claim generation has been automated), extension study preferences and overtime pay, to name a few. This information is auditable. Much effort has gone into extending existing systems (e.g. Finance, Library and Registry) and integrating these with the newer MIS.

The impact on effectiveness is increasing. People with curriculum responsibilities are realising the potential for informing their decisions, e.g. by looking at retention rates. A recent development - 'TRASH' - enables course planners to monitor their objectives continuously.

The register system was designed around the traditional class, but they have also developed a swipe card system for use in open workshops where people come and go at arbitrary times.

QUALITY AND EFFICIENCY - Key factors and issues

- In recent years, colleges have been exhorted to develop and use performance indicators to measure their effectiveness and efficiency, but those recommended are based on conventional courses designed for group learning.

- The Joint Efficiency Study recommended the construction of four ratios as measures of effectiveness:

  - students enrolled: target enrolment
  - students completing: students enrolled
  - successful students: students enrolled
  - students progressed: students completing

It is at issue whether these are appropriate indicators of effectiveness for a college seeking to provide flexible access to learning and accreditation. If they are appropriate, do they require new definitions? If they are not appropriate, what should replace them?

- Staff student ratios (SSRs), based on the concept of economical group size, are irrelevant as a basis for measuring the efficiency of new one-to-one services such as APL/A and individual action planning for, e.g. holders of training credits.

- If SSRs are no longer appropriate performance indicators, more appropriate alternatives must be found. These would need to be used consistently by external agencies (e.g. DES, FE Funding Council, TECs) as well as internally by colleges in order to achieve mutual understanding.

- An achievement-led resourcing model would need to take account of the relative needs of different groups of learners, and recognise and record the achievement of institutional and programme area performance in relation to equal opportunity targets.

- The nature of the data currently required from colleges by the DES and LEAs for monitoring purposes influences the shape of the service that is provided.

- Staff have been trained and gained their experience with traditional teaching styles. Some may not adapt easily and quality may suffer as a result.

- Lack of adequate learning resources, IT facilities, etc. can hinder quality.

- Financial limitations may necessitate the use of learning environments not ideally suited to flexible learning and quality may suffer as a result.

Performance indicators based on units of achievement

In its Strategic Plan for 1990-93, Croydon LEA suggests that performance indicators based on units of achievement might include:

- The unit cost of participants' achievement per programme area, where cost is defined as including teaching and all provision overheads.

- The average numbers of units (of achievement) in relation to client participation times per programme area and mode of attendance.

- 'Value-added' rates per programme area, where value-added is defined as the average level of increase in achievement in terms of the difference between clients' starting attainments and finishing attainments. (These may for example be defined by using National Curriculum attainment targets on entry, in relation to number and levels of NVQ units achieved.)

- The physical space used, on average, to provide one unit of achievement per programme area and mode of attendance.

It is widely accepted that developing performance indicators of the above type will take time and effort. Some of the more commonly used indicators such as average class size (ACS), average lecturer hours (ALH), and average student hours (ASH), are seen by many as an inadequate measure of the actual performance of a service.

High achievement through flexible learning

East Warwickshire College now offers all its Management Professional Courses by flexible delivery. Since making the change they have recorded excellent results. 'East Warwickshire students achieved a 95% pass rate on Institute of Marketing courses compared to a national average of 30% and the College also had the highest pass rate of any examination centre for the Certificate in Advertising and Marketing with 90%. In Association of Accounting Technician examinations, two East Warwickshire students were among the national 'top ten'.

SECTION 3

SUMMARY AND PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

There is clear qualitative evidence of significant change and increased flexibility of access to further education being effected during the last five years, although there is not always a strong commitment on the part of all staff to widening access beyond provision for 16-19 year olds. Nor is there, as yet, unanimous acceptance of the need for change to meet the requirements of NVQs, partly because of problems at national level in their introduction.

Nevertheless, there is a perceptible realisation in most colleges that much remains to be done in terms of widening access if further education is to play its full part in meeting the nation's skill requirements and in raising levels of learning and the achievement of qualifications.

Section Two of this report presents a compendium of factors and issues confronting colleges in their attempts to widen access to learning and accreditation. Analysis of this compendium suggests that there are certain key factors and major inhibitors to progress that should be priorities for future action. These major inhibitors and related recommendations for action at both local and national level, are presented in this section, under the following notation:

> Inhibitor to progress, recommended action at local level and recommended action at national level

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Strategy

Inhibitor

The early stages of the change processes featured in this report were of a piecemeal nature as new approaches were trialled and refined. The lack of an holistic approach reflective of, for example, the interdependence of moves toward flexible assessment and the provision of a flexible delivery system catering for individual needs, is a barrier to further progress in many colleges.

Local

Some colleges need to recognise more fully the synergy between different elements of current change processes and begin to make more co-ordinated progress on several fronts simultaneously.

National

The categories used to identify priorities for action under available development fund headings should be consolidated to reflect the more holistic approach needed as change processes become better embedded.

Inhibitor

Most colleges are in a position to make significant progress toward the goals identified in this report but some are inhibited by the lack of a strategic plan which expresses a senior management vision, in terms of intermediate targets, which enable progress to be monitored effectively.

Local

Where these do not already exist, the preparation of a documented strategy for widening access to learning and accreditation is recommended. Such a strategy should include targets which can be translated into performance for each programme area and all cross-college functions.

National

Where the documentation suggested above already exists, its preparation in a form suitable for publication together with annual progress reviews could provide a comparatively inexpensive means of disseminating the experience of a cross-section of colleges.

Inhibitor

Although many of the changes outlined in this report will be beneficial to all client groups, some of them are imperative if the full potential of significant numbers of adults is to be realised. The pursuit of such goals in terms of the personal development of individuals and the national interest may be important. For college managers, the business logic of targeting such groups is, at present much less compelling.

Local

As colleges gear up to cater for wider participation in FE by 16-19-year-olds, they must also develop a clear mission which defines and extends the service provided to adults.

National

Funding arrangements for FE must encourage (rather than deter) colleges to wide access for adults to learning and qualifications.

Organisational structure

Inhibitor

Organisational structures and management styles orientated toward traditional curriculum delivery systems and to periods of steady incremental change can inhibit rapid progress towards new models of curriculum delivery and more rapid change processes.

Local

Colleges which are not already moving towards 'flatter' organisational structures with decentralised management of change should review their future organisational development.

National

There exists an interesting mix of innovative practice in college organisational development which could be more widely disseminated.

Funding, resourcing and pricing

Inhibitor

Current formulae used for the funding of colleges based on target FTEs, and concomitant systems for internal budget allocation, militate against the development of more flexible provision and related advisory and guidance services.

Local	National
Within current funding, colleges can seek to encourage learner-centred provision by appropriate systems for internal budget allocations and by ensuring adequate resourcing of comprehensive advisory and guidance services.	There is a need for development and dissemination of alternative models of funding, including the use of units of achievement and learner-gain. Such work would be of value to the new body for funding post-16 institutions.

Staff development

Inhibitor

The skills required by teachers in assisting flexible learners are, in the main, different from those used in a traditional approach. Currently, these new skills are possessed by only a small minority of staff.

Local	National
Colleges should provide for staff, action-based and sharply focused development programmes related to learner support skills. Support staff should be involved, where possible, and consideration should be given to involving staff of complementary providers and local agencies in shared staff development programmes.	A standards-based national framework for continuing professional development is needed to recognise the changing roles of college staff and to improve their access to accreditation.

CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT

Threshold services

Inhibitor

The sophisticated advice and guidance systems required by potential learners seeking flexible access are not yet generally available.

Local	National
Following a review and audit of their current advisory and guidance services, colleges are recommended to initiate action which will lead to an all-year-round comprehensive service closely linked with TECs and other local agencies. Such action should be synchronised with programmes of curriculum development aimed at facilitating flexible access.	There is a need to develop and disseminate models of advice and guidance provision which will meet the needs of the community and local industry, and which exploit the potential of an inter-agency approach to the provision of a comprehensive service. These models should include resourcing/funding implications.

Barriers to access

Inhibitor

Many potential learners are inhibited from seeking access to learning and accreditation in further education either by negative perceptions of their own abilities or by a perceived unwelcoming image of further education institutions.

Local

Colleges are recommended to review their information processes, their enquiries procedures and their reception facilities with a view to making improvements that would enhance the image they present to potential new learners.

National

Colleges would be assisted by the collation and dissemination of information on ways in which a variety of colleges have sought to overcome perceived barriers at the threshold.

Curriculum organisation

Inhibitor

Modularisation/unitisation of the curriculum based on outcomes is generally recognised as a prerequisite for flexible access but few - if any - colleges have succeeded in modularising more than a minority of their provision. Most progress has been made in curriculum areas in which NVQs are already available.

Local

Colleges should, as a matter of priority seek to make their provision more accessible through a systematically phased programme of curriculum modularisation.

National

Progress in modularisation/unitisation of the curriculum will be greatly facilitated by an acceleration in the spread of NVQs available, and if academic and vocational qualifications can be brought within a common and coherent framework.

Managing and supporting learning

Inhibitor

Provision based on individual cycles of action planning, induction, and progress review, in place of or within yearly cycles of group enrolment, group learning and group assessment will require colleges to rethink their operational and administrative systems, and deployment of staff and resources quite fundamentally.

Local

Colleges will need to review current practice and, where necessary, institute new administrative and organisational systems that have built-in flexibility.

National

Colleges would be assisted in developing their new procedures by the collation and dissemination of information from those colleges that have initiated action on this problem.

Inhibitor

Patterns of staff deployment to give tutorial support to flexible learners are significantly different from those used in a traditional group-based system. In a transitional period, moving towards a learner-centred approach, colleges experience difficulty in providing flexible tutorial support.

Local

The implications of new provision for staff deployment are an essential ingredient of curriculum development and should form part of initial planning when colleges are seeking to widen access.

National

There is a need for the development and dissemination of alternative models of staff deployment that enhance the management and support of learning.

Tools for flexible learning

Inhibitor

Flexible access depends to some extent, though not entirely, on resource-based learning. In many curriculum areas, high quality learning materials are unavailable, difficult to locate or extremely expensive.

Local

Investment in in-house production of good quality learning materials should be examined carefully by colleges. Where such development is carried out, entrepreneurial steps should be taken to cover costs.

National

There is a need for easily-accessed databases on the availability of learning materials and for opportunities for local evaluation of published materials prior to investment.

Assessment and accreditation

Inhibitor

A lack of common features between academic and vocational qualifications is restricting flexible access to assessment and qualifications.

Local

By means of curriculum and staff development programmes, colleges can review the curriculum of conventional courses, and restructure them in terms of learning outcomes and units.

National

The introduction of criterion referencing to all academic and vocational qualifications would facilitate flexible access to learning and assessment.

Inhibitor

A general lack of awareness concerning NVQs is leading to an absence of public demand.

Local	National
Colleges can contribute to the raising of awareness about NVQs by means of college governors, employer liaison and their own marketing strategies.	The public needs to be made aware of the purpose of NVQs and their potential for flexible access to training and qualifications.

Inhibitor

New approaches to assessment are inhibited both by difficulties in providing work-based assessment and by the undue emphasis that, in some cases, is still placed on information testing by written examinations.

Local	National
Colleges will need to exploit their own work-simulation facilities for assessment purposes and also develop new patterns of staff deployment.	National examining and validating bodies should review the extent to which written-based assessment is appropriate for some competence-based learning programmes.

Inhibitor

Progress in the development of APL/A is currently inhibited by lack of staff experience, absence of top-up provision, a perceived reluctance on the part of some EVBs and a lack of understanding from employers and employees.

Local	National
Colleges need to co-ordinate staff development and curriculum development to ensure that they have both the necessary staff expertise and appropriate top-up provision available.	A sustained national campaign is required to secure greater national awareness of the potential benefits of APL/A to be gained both by individuals and by employers.

OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT

Staffing and accommodation

Inhibitor

Conditions of service for college teaching staff are related, in their main provisions, to group-based teaching and to college years specified in an agreed number of weeks, neither of which is a characteristic element of flexible learning.

Local	National
College managers and staff may wish to seek ways in which agreed conditions of service may be implemented to facilitate flexibility.	Negotiation of local agreements would be assisted by an investigation aimed at identifying and disseminating examples of agreements that have been reached, in a range of colleges, to allow for existing conditions of service to be implemented in ways which enhance flexible provision.

Inhibitor

The provision of flexible access to learning and accreditation makes new demands on support staff and these new roles are frequently unrecognised in college staffing establishments.

Local

A new 'hybrid' breed of staff - with neither conventional lecturer nor support staff specifications - is emerging in some colleges, to take on new roles in various aspects of flexible learning provision. This development needs to be explored by other colleges.

National

In order to assist colleges in formulating new staffing establishments and to encourage the maintenance of coherent career structures for new types of staff, it would be helpful to identify and disseminate common patterns of development and ways in which they operate. The information disseminated would include job descriptions, conditions of service and status.

Inhibitor

Accommodation in both old and relatively new college buildings is usually designed to cater for the group-based approach to teaching. In some cases, the conversion required to provide a learner-centred approach may be inhibited by structural factors or by the heavy cost implications.

Local

Colleges need to carry out phased conversions to provide learning workshops, one-to-one interview and tutorial rooms, and spaces appropriate to threshold services.

National

Colleges would be assisted by the collation and dissemination of information from those colleges that have successfully carried out conversions. There is also a need for publications of design briefs for new buildings.

Administration, fee structure and MIS

Inhibitor

Flexible access to the curriculum requires new approaches within college administration systems, but in many colleges the need for these new approaches - such as enrolment at any time, flexible fee structures, and assessment on demand - has not been recognised or their implementation has not yet been achieved.

Local

College administrative staff should play a part in development working parties and committees in order that they may be given opportunities to explore the administrative implications of curriculum development that seeks to widen access.

National

Colleges would be assisted by the development and dissemination of models of administrative systems which accommodate flexible access to learning and accreditation. In particular, the use of technology to support the administration of learner-centred colleges needs to be explored and publicised.

Inhibitor

Computerised MIS have, in the main, been developed to support some teaching and assessment systems based on annual enrolments on year-long courses and appear to be unable to cope satisfactorily with flexible access and flexible length of programme satisfactorily.

Local	National
Personnel in centralised MIS units in colleges need to work in close collaboration with curriculum providers to ensure that computerised MIS are able to serve their users with relevant information to support flexible provision.	Computerised MIS which can cope with flexible provision need to be developed and/or made more widely available as a priority.

Quality and efficiency

Inhibitor

Lack of awareness of hard evidence which demonstrates the benefits of flexible learning for learner attainment is a major inhibitor to change for individual teachers who believe their current practice to be effective.

Local	National
Staff involved in flexible learning delivery should be encouraged to collect evidence of success in a more systematic manner for dissemination to colleagues.	Existing hard evidence of the success of flexible learning should be more widely disseminated, further evidence covering a wider range of provision should be collected and disseminated.

Inhibitor

Effectiveness and efficiency indicators recommended by the Joint Efficiency study and currently being used in colleges are, in many cases, inappropriate to the provision of flexible access.

Local	National
The identification of performance indicators as a means of progress review will support the process of developing a coherent and effective strategy for extending flexible access to learning and assessment.	Performance indicators relevant to flexible access need to be developed and recommended for incorporation into any external requirements for quality assurance.

APPENDICES

A. THE PROJECT

This report is the outcome of a project, *Access to learning and accreditation in WRFE*, commissioned in 1990 by the Training, Enterprise and Education Directorate of the Department of Employment, and undertaken by FEU 1990-1.

METHODOLOGY

Oct.-Dec. 1990 Phase 1. Exploration

a) Preliminary identification of issues that either facilitate or act as blocks to progress in implementing flexible access to learning and accreditation.

b) Collection of data by means of:

- an analysis of project documentation available
- interviews with project co-ordinators, representatives of college management, TA Regional FE Advisers, relevant networks (e.g. FL co-ordinators, NVQ staff development) and others.

Oct.-Feb. 1991 Phase 2. Case study/fieldwork

a) Selection of case studies to illustrate factors which promote a widening of access to learning and accreditation in WRFE, as well as 'blocks' to progress in implementing flexible learning and accreditation across the curriculum and across institutions.

b) In-depth fieldwork in order to prepare case studies (above.)

Monitoring and evaluation

The project reported to a Steering Group at the end of each phase. The Steering Group included representatives of relevant sectors of the TA, college management, a TEC and others from whose experience the project could benefit. (Details of the Steering Committee membership are given in Appendix D.)

Project Team

Project Manager: Sue Carroll
FEU Development officer

Project Consultants: Ken Dixon
Education Consultant
Andrew Haldane
Director
Staffordshire Open Learning Unit

APPENDIX B.

SELECTION OF CASE STUDIES

Case-study visits should include:

- a range of sizes and locations (rural/inner city, wide geographical spread) of colleges;
- colleges that show evidence of strategic planning with the aim of extending access to learning and accreditation in WRFE :
  - whole institutional approach
  - moving in a co-ordinated way on several 'fronts' at once
- colleges that illustrate specific clusters of issues, (see the Learner-centred college diagram):
  - factors that promote widening of access/flexibility /interesting or good practice
  - progress in overcoming 'issues'
  - blockages to progress
  - barriers to flexible/widening of access
- inclusion of:
  - a tertiary college
  - sing'., multiple college LEAs
  - areas of the curriculum where NVQs are in place
- avoidance of a concentration on colleges where developments are already well documented
- consideration of the impact of externally funded development projects on widening access to learning and accreditation:
  - factors that assisted impact
  - factors that prevented/reduced impact

APPENDIX C.

CASE-STUDY VISITS AND RESEARCH

Acton College
Avon LEA (FE Development Centre)
Blackpool and the Fylde College
Calderdale College, Halifax
College of North East London
Coventry Technical College
Craven College, Skipton
Cross Keys College
Croydon College
Croydon LEA
East Birmingham College
East Warwickshire College
Filton College
Greenhill College, Harrow
Hall Green College, Birmingham
Hartlepool College
Hertford LEA
Hinckley College
Kidderminster College
Lowestoft College
Milton Keynes College
Newcastle College, Newcastle upon Tyne
Newport College
North Trafford College
Norfolk College of Art and Technology
Peterborough Regional College
Rotherham College of Art and Technology
Somerset LEA
South Trafford College
Wakefield District College
Wirral Metropolitan College

APPENDIX D.

STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

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Flexible Learning Advisor,TVEI 8, Employment Department

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FURTHER EDUCATION UNIT

Objectives

The objects for which the **Further Education Unit (FEU)** is established are to promote, encourage and develop the efficient provision of further education in the United Kingdom and for that purpose:

a) to review and evaluate the range of existing further education curricula and programmes and to identify overlap, duplication, deficiencies and inconsistencies therein;

b) to determine priorities for action to improve the provision of further education and to make recommendations as to how such improvement can be effected;

c) to carry out studies in further education and to support investigations of and investigations in, and the development of, further education curricula and to contribute to and assist in the evaluation of initiatives in further education;

d) to disseminate and publish information and to assist in the dissemination and publication of information about recommendations for and experiments and developments in further education.

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